PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD:
A META-INVESTIGATION

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PREFACE

We are hopefully entering an age when the barriers with which we so often unnecessarily encompass ourselves are being lowered, and in which our formerly circumscribed intellects are open to ever increasing challenges. Slowly theists and atheists are learning to carry on an authentic dialogue where before there was only suspicion and mistrust. The choice of dialogue, of real confrontation, is more dangerous than the solitary one in which no real challenges exist and no real options are entertained; but so too it is more exciting and ultimately more human.

I have sought in this dissertation to understand the dialogue between theists and atheists through a consideration of the theists' proofs for the existence of God and to offer an interpretation whereby the integrity of each may be preserved. It is my hope that each may come to understand the other better and in so doing come to understand themselves. I am convinced that theism and atheism have much in common and that each has much to learn from the other. It is my purpose to issue an invitation to understand, a challenge to dialogue.

In the years I have spent at the University of Notre Dame I have been privileged to participate in such a dialogue. When I came here I was concerned that a non-theist might be asked to compromise himself and that not all ideas would be considered and weighed equally. Happily my prejudices were ill-founded. Instead I have been exposed to intelligent articulate theists who have, in their patient discussions with me, tried to explain the meaning of their faith. We have each profited from these conversations. In a very real sense what follows is a record of that dialogue.

It was essential to this study that there be an atmosphere of mutual respect and interest. I am indebted to the University of Notre Dame, its students and faculty, for providing it. I am particularly grateful to my Director, Professor Joseph Bobik, whose profound understanding of St. Thomas, and of theism in general, made the preparation of this study an authentic learning experience for me.

Beyond the debt I owe to these men for their enlightenment I owe a personal debt to my family, especially to my mother who first taught me that the exercise of one's reason is the most properly human task. Most of all I am indebted to my wife Susan, to whom I dedicate this dissertation, without whose support and encouragement this study could never have been completed. What follows is as much the result of her efforts as my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

PREFACE iii

INTRODUCTION. 1

CHAPTER I: An Analysis of the Argument 14
- 1. Structure of the Proofs 16
- 2. How the Proofs Work 17

CHAPTER II: If the Per Aliud then the Per Se: A Defense . . 26
- 1. Is the implication analytic? 26
- 2. Is the implication causal? 33
- 3. The impossibility of an infinite regress. 37
- 4. The significance of the infinite regress. 49
- 5. Summary 63

CHAPTER III: If the Per Aliud then the Per Se: A Criticism. 65
- 1. An infinite regress is inconceivable. 66
- 2. There must be a first term. 74
- 3. That the universe as a whole requires a cause . . 81
- 4. Summary 86

CHAPTER IV: There Exists a Per Aliud: A Defense 89
- 1. There exists a per aliud. 90
- 2. Thomistic Metaphysics 100

CHAPTER V: There Exists a Per Aliud: A Criticism. 118
- 1. Does there exist a per aliud? 119
- 2. Metaphysical presuppositions. 138

CHAPTER VI: The Ontological Argument 156
- 1. The per se. 157
- 2. The ontological argument in Descartes 167
- 3. The ontological argument in St. Anselm. 190

CHAPTER VII: The Dilemma 214
- 1. Agnosticism 216
- 2. Pragmatic arguments 222
- 3. Conclusion. 236

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 240

INTRODUCTION

It is not the intention of this study to attempt either a proof or a disproof of the existence of God. It is to be noted, at the outset, that the object of this inquiry is the debate about God, not the existence or non-existence of God. I intend to discuss the dialogue (or lack of it) between theists and atheists. I agree with Paley that, "The existence and character of the Deity is, in every view, the most interesting of all human speculations."[1] I do not, however, propose to participate in that speculation in the pages ahead, but rather to consider critically its history. What I am proposing is a "meta-investigation," that is to say, a discussion of a discussion. It is not my intention to forge an addition to that dialogue so much as to attempt to understand it. My objective is "critical"; I hope to discover the foundations of the arguments, to explore the conditions upon which their possibility necessarily depends.

By a proof, or argument, for the existence of God I understand a rational argument which purports to conclude to the existence of God (or some divine quality) from premises which are in principle available to all men. Obviously, the premises of an argument do not have to be public for that argument to be valid. However, we are here concerned with arguments which are designed to elicit a public consent.[2] That is to say, arguments which claim to be cogent for all men. If the conclusion is to be universally acceptable then the premises must be open to all men. Hence, in Romans I:20, St. Paul writes:

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[1] William Paley, Natural Theology: Selections, ed. Frederick Ferre (Indianapolis, 1963), p. 85.

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them.

He is not suggesting that evidences of God have been disclosed just to some chosen men; on the contrary he is pointing out that these "manifestations" are public, open to all members of the human species, so that if any men fail to appreciate their cogency, "They are without excuse." Similarly, the proofs set forth by St. Thomas begin by affirming that the evidence upon which they rest is open to all. "*Certum est enim, et sensu constat, aliqua moveri in hoc mundo*," or "*Invenimus enim in istis sensibilibus esse ordinem causarum efficientium*."[3] They are pointing to elements present in the experience of all men. Clearly this requirement that the premises of an argument be public precludes any proofs on the grounds of religious experience[4] (unless one wishes to suggest that religious experiences are sustained by all men). To approach the same point with the vocabulary of Ayer, the problem with arguments from religious experience is that they are not verifiable.

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[2] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cleveland, 1960), pp. 31, 61. See also, Etienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York, 1960), p. 60; Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (Stuttgart-Bad, Cannstatt, 1964), pp. 262-263; St. Augustine, *Of True Religion*, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Chicago, 1959), p. 70.

[3] S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summae Theologiae*, in *Opera Omnia*, Leonine edn., 16 vols. (Romae, 1882-1948), I, q.2, a.3.

[4] See John Stuart Mill, *Theism* (Indianapolis, 1957), p. 23.

> Scientific method cannot deny that the . . . spokesmen of the supernatural hear voices, but it cannot accept these voices, as they are reported, as valid testimony about the world of fact.[5]

There is no way in which I can experience the rapture of the mystic. It is his. I may have my own, but it will be mine. "Mysticism means nothing, absolutely nothing, to the man who has no experience of it."[6] The first premises of Aquinas' proofs, on the other hand, are public. Motion, for instance, is present in the experience of all men. Or, as Ayer would have it, motion is verifiable, religious experience is not. If the premises of the argument are not universally acceptable and verifiable, the conclusion which rests on those premises will not be universally cogent. Men cannot be expected to embrace a conclusion which rests on premises which are hidden from them; the premises must be public. If these proofs are to be, in principle, acceptable to all men they will have to be supported by evidence which is, in principle, accessible to all men.

In considering the debate between theists and atheists we do not refer to those believers or disbelievers who approach such demonstrations with a closed mind, (Clearly, there is an emotional element which for some simply precludes a discussion of the matter.), but rather to those individuals who make a sincere effort to appreciate the weight of their opponent's arguments. Consider, for example, the classic Russell-Copleston debate of 1948. I am willing to grant at the outset that for most theists and many atheists there is no issue at all. The problem of the existence of God is perhaps a problem for few; it is, however, a problem for philosophers.[7]

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[5] Sidney Hook, The Quest for Being (New York, 1934), p. 79. Cf. Wallace Matson, The Existence of God (Ithaca, New York, 1965), p. 240. "If somebody happens to have access to Absolute Truth that fact alone does not make it reasonable . . . unless he can support his assertions with evidence."

[6] Henri Bergson, The Two Sources Of Morality and Religion, trans. R. A. Audra and C. Brereton (Garden City, New York, 1935), p. 237.

Our inquiry asks: Why is it that traditional theistic demonstrations of the existence of God fail to convince the atheist, but at the same time seem conclusive to many theists? and, conversely, why are reasonable theists not swayed by the apparently cogent arguments of the atheist?

Our study is not intended to establish the validity or invalidity of these demonstrations. Validity is merely the relationship between the premises of an argument and its conclusion. There are a plethora of discussions to which one may turn if it is solely the validity or invalidity of the demonstrations which is of concern; both have been defended many times. We wish to raise the more basic question of assent to the premises of the argument. It is naive and overly optimistic to suppose that the issue between the theist and the atheist is simply the validity of one or more of the traditional argument forms. The issue is more profound; it concerns the acceptability of the premises themselves. Does the atheist accept these premises? Can he? If not, he obviously will not grant the argument's conclusion, even if he admits its validity. It is the contention of many theists that these premises are perfectly public, that they are open to all. They maintain that the premises are of two sorts, empirical (and part of all men's experience), or analytic (necessary truths to which reason must, by its very nature, subscribe). If this claim is true, then the only question remaining is that of the validity of the inference. If it is not, if the premises are neither empirically manifest nor rationally self-evident, then there cannot be any fruitful consideration of the acceptability of the argument apart from an explanation and defense of the premises. And if that defense is not successful there will be little point to subsequent debates about the validity of the argument.

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[7] See Charles Hartshorne, The Logic of Perfection (LaSalle, Illinois, 1962), p. 3. See also Gilson, Elements, p. 46, and A. C. Ewing, The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy (New York, 1962), p. 237.

There are clearly difficulties involved in approaching the entire spectrum of the theist/atheist dispute solely through its expression in the history of proofs and counter proofs. "Philosophy of religion is not religion."[8] The objection that we do the religious issue a disservice by focusing only on the rather academic debate about the acceptability of proofs for the existence of God, when they are only a small part of religion, is to some extent justified. No doubt there are serious difficulties in selecting the particular expression of formal proofs as an avenue to approach the broader, more general, confrontation between believer and non-believer (only a fraction of which has solidified into logical arguments). This is no less dangerous than judging icebergs by the characteristics of the mass floating above the surface of the sea. "Christian faith is

[8] Ewing, p. 268.

clearly more than the assent of the intellect to the truth of certain propositions."[9] "The God Whose existence we demonstrate is but a part of the God Whose existence we hold to be true on the strength of our faith. . . . In this sense, the God of rational knowledge is . . . included within the God of faith."[10] However, our purpose is not to demonstrate that faith is dependent upon proofs, but rather to explore the relationship (if any) between the arguments themselves and the larger religious context. Are the premises of these proofs open to all men or only to some--only to those who view the world in a particular (religious) way? We wish to know whether the proofs for the existence of God necessarily presuppose a religious milieu; whether, as St. Anselm says, "For all that a man can say or know still deeper grounds of so great a truth lie concealed."[11] I am well aware that these arguments often have their origin in an illusive (perhaps a subconscious) domain of feelings and sentiments. Our question is, do the arguments necessarily presuppose that larger religious body of beliefs, so that they can be cogent only for those individuals who subscribe to those beliefs? What I want to know is, can these proofs stand by themselves or must they ultimately be reduced in some way to the body of beliefs from which they sprang? If we learn that the proofs are contingent upon the acceptance of this larger body of religious beliefs (and hence that they are not public[12]) we will then come to understand why the atheist will not be able to appreciate their cogency. And we will be made aware of those beliefs themselves.

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[9] Kent Bendall and Frederick Ferre, Exploring the Logic of Faith (New York, 1962), p. 11.

[10] Gilson, Elements, p. 58.

[11] St. Anselm, Basic Writings, trans. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, Illinois, 1962), p. 181.

[12] Assuming, that is, that not all men share these religious insights.

Granted that there are some liabilities in this approach, there are nonetheless considerations which, I believe, justify it. Most importantly, these proofs are understood to be rational expressions of religious belief; as such they may be examined objectively. If, on the other hand, one were to plunge directly into the underlying body of sentiments (whether theistic or atheistic), with its morass of prejudices, opinions, and arational feelings, all objectivity would be lost. We would no longer be in the position of rationally examining and identifying these sentiments; instead we would be committed to their defense. Furthermore, by employing the approach of the meta-investigation, and addressing ourselves to the dialogue itself, rather than its object (the existence or non-existence of God), we are not forced to respond to the significant objection that the existence of God is not to be debated. De facto there is a debate. Finally, the selection of these proofs as a mechanism for gaining a deeper awareness of what theism really is has the advantage of allowing us to address ourselves to a finite body of readily available literature.

In undertaking this study of proofs for the existence of God I find myself in the position of someone, "on the outside looking in"; I do not find them cogent. (Nor am I convinced that, if I did find the arguments themselves valid, I would number myself among the ranks of the believers.) Because of this, because the arguments do not seem to me to be proofs, I am most curious as to why they seem to be proofs to others. If it be objected that the case is prejudiced from the start; that no atheist can pass judgment on the arguments offered by theists, I would note: First, it is not my intention to prove these arguments unacceptable, but rather to ask, "On what grounds are they acceptable?" Second, why is it that the atheist is said to be incapable of objectively judging the cogency of the theists' arguments? A physicist who holds to a particle theory of light can surely judge the cogency of the proofs put forward by a partisan of the "wave" school. If these proofs are intended to compete in the open market place of ideas then they must be subjected to the scrutiny of friend and foe alike. To limit their audience to theists is to admit that they are not proofs, but rather reassurances--arguments designed to re-enforce pre-existing beliefs. Finally, consider the advantages to be gained by this approach. The non-theist is able to judge the proofs "from afar." He is not a partisan. He can more clearly identify the presuppositions. Furthermore, statements about proofs for the existence of God are, more often than not, not so much statements about the arguments themselves as about their observers. In noting the reaction of the non-theist to these proofs one can surely achieve a perspective whereby one will be better able to penetrate to his own presuppositions. One of the most regrettable aspects of the theist/atheist debate is that there has been little true dialogue. Each side merely "bides time" until the other has finished its soliloquy and then launches into its own. I believe that if we addressed ourselves more constructively to the arguments of our opponents (be they theist or atheist) we would each emerge richer. In the case of the atheist commenting on the position of the theist, the theist stands to gain a perspective on his own work which he could not otherwise hope to attain, and the atheist would, by dissenting from some of the presuppositions of the theist, gain an insight into his own presuppositions. Needless to say, the converse is equally true. Atheists are just as much in need of the constructive criticism of the theist--and theists will gain immeasurably (i.e., strengthen their own positions) by undertaking the challenge.

It is readily apparent to all who have examined this body of literature that it is not typical of academic debates; it is generally conducted in an atmosphere that is at best hostile and at worst openly vituperative. It is precisely this atmosphere which led Heine to remark:

> The mere discussion by anyone of the existence of God causes me to feel a strange disquietude, an uneasy dread such as I once experienced in visiting New Bedlam in London, when, for a moment losing sight of my guide, I was surrounded by madmen.[13]

History reveals that this discussion has been shamefully characterized by far more talking than listening.

We propose to do some listening; to evaluate arguments put forth, instead of launching ad hominems. We do not subscribe to the premise that atheists are morally derelict[14] any more than that theists are soft-headed sentimentalists who are unable to face existence without a crutch.[15] We begin by granting both the intelligence and sincerity of each.

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[13] As quoted by Paul Carus. Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, trans. and ed. Paul Carus (LaSalle, Illinois, 1967), p. 274.

[14] See Clarke, pp. 392-395.

[15] See Bertrand Russell, Human Society in Ethics and Politics (New York, 1954), p. 183.

In the discussion of proofs for the existence of God, opponents, such as Ayer, have concluded by showing that, "there is no possibility of demonstrating the existence of God,"[16]--from which one is led to conclude only that theists must be intellectually disturbed knights bent on the quixotic mission of achieving the impossible. Conversely, proponents of such proofs have argued, "he who does not note the First Principle from such great signs is foolish,"[17]--which leaves little doubt as to the conclusion to be drawn in the case of the atheist. Clearly, critics on both sides have stopped too soon. We cannot rest content with an explanation which resolves the debate by attributing our opponent's thesis to lack of intelligence. We must address the serious question of why intelligent men are so unalterably opposed. That is precisely the inquiry to which we commit ourselves in this study. As stated above, the question before us is: Why is it that traditional theistic demonstrations of the existence of God fail to convince the atheist, but at the same time seem conclusive to many intelligent theists? Let us accept the invitation to forge a new answer to Feuerbach's question, "Even if one grants that the notion of a supernatural God is false, how is one to account for its presence?"[18]

When Nicholas of Cusa writes, "What is easier than to believe in God?"[19] he is not merely being rhetorical. The fact is, hard as it may be for some non-theists to appreciate, that men such as Nicholas see God, or evidences of God, wherever they cast their glance. For many theists, "all the creatures of this sensible world lead the mind . . . to the eternal God";[20] for them, "the evidences or proofs of God's existence are countless."[21] It is because these testaments of God's existence are so plain that theists are often led to suggest that there must be some deficiency in the perception of the atheist:

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[16] Alfred Jules Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (New York, 1935), p. 115.

[17] St. Bonaventura, The Mind's Road to God, trans. George Boas (Indianapolis, 1953), p. 13.

[18] Ludwig Feuerbach, Principles of the Philosophy of the Future, trans. Manfred H. Vogel (Indianapolis, 1966), p. xxii.

[19] Nicholas of Cusa, The Vision of God, trans. Emma Salter (New York, 1928), p. 125.

> Yet the notices that God has been pleased to give us of Himself, are so many and so obvious . . . that no man of the meanest capacity and greatest disadvantages whatsoever . . . can be ignorant of Him, but he must be utterly without excuse.[22]

Bonaventure goes so far as to suggest, "He, therefore, who is not illuminated by such great splendor of created things is blind."[23]

And yet Feuerbach, looking at the same world (though perhaps somewhat differently), concludes, "There is no God; it is as clear as the sun and as evident as the day that there is no God, and still more that there can be none."[24] Why is it, when theists see proof of God everywhere, that Scriven writes, "there is no alternative to atheism. . . . Atheism is obligatory in the absence of any evidence for God's existence."[25] How is it that Matson is able to conclude:

> Are there any reasons for believing in the existence of a diety? . . . As far as I can tell there are none. Is it then

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[20] St. Bonaventura, p. 20.

[21] Robert Flint, Theism (London, 1889), p. 62.

[22] Clarke, p. 262.

[23] St. Bonaventura, p. 13.

[24] As quoted by Flint, p. 8.

[25] Michael Scriven, Primary Philosophy (New York, 1951), pp. 102-103.

> reasonable, in any sense at all, to believe that there is a deity? Apparently it is not.[26]

These men are not simply juxtaposing emotional ejaculations; they are disputing the viability of specific arguments. Theists are maintaining that from premises A, B, and C the conclusion D follows. Atheists deny it. In other (less emotional) discussions when two parties disagree about the acceptability of a conclusion it is generally the case that the dispute may be traced to a prior disagreement about one or more of the premises. That is, to use the above example, when the atheist refuses to grant the conclusion D, it is probably because he does not subscribe to A, B, or C. The best way to discern whether or not this hypothesis is tenable is to identify the premises of the theistic proofs to see if in fact they incorporate some propositions which the atheist cannot accept.

"Those . . . who are to join in argument with one another must to some extent understand one another; for if this does not happen how are they to join in argument? . . ."[27] To understand is to attempt to discern what "stands under" or beneath things as we see them. In the case of the theist/atheist debate, a good first step toward such understanding lies, as we have just noted, in identifying the premises which underlie their contrary conclusions. Why should this debate be forced into conditions so different from those of other academic controversies? When two physicists debate particle vs. wave theories of light they do not seem compelled to

[26] Matson, p. 239.

[27] Aristotle, Metaphysics, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), 1062a12.

slander each other's ancestors or impugn each other's intellectual capacities. On the contrary, assuming the competency of their antagonist, they begin to search for the source of their disagreement; they attempt to penetrate to the presuppositions upon which their opponent's argument is founded. I see no reason why we cannot do likewise.

J. S. Mill observes:

> Whatever opinion a person may adopt in any subject that admits of controversy, his assurance if he is a cautious thinker cannot be complete unless he is able to account for the existence of the opposite opinion.[28]

That is the challenge to which this dissertation hopes to respond.

The first chapter of this discussion will be devoted to examining traditional theistic arguments with the intention of identifying, or precipitating, their essential elements. We will then, in the following chapters, examine the credibility of those pivotal premises.

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[28] Mill, Theism, p. 4.

CHAPTER I

We take as our first task the analysis of the arguments for the existence of God. We will begin by making clear the logical structure of the traditional proofs; this will be followed by a consideration of their content.

Proofs for the existence of God have been divided into a priori and a posteriori, both on grounds of the point of departure and on grounds of the procedure for verifying their premises. If the point of departure in the premises is seen as an effect of, and so posterior to, God, and the movement terminates in God as cause, the argument is said to be a posteriori, i.e., from what is posterior. If, on the other hand, the point of departure is the divine nature, seen as in some way accounting for, and so prior to, the divine existence, the argument is said to be a priori, i.e., from what is prior. Since Kant, a priori arguments have been called "ontological," i.e., from the being of God. In terms of the method of verifying their premises, those arguments are said to be a priori whose premises are self-confirming, i.e., they are composed of necessary propositions whose truth may be confirmed independently of all experience.[1] A posteriori arguments are arguments one or more of whose premises depend on experiential verification. A posteriori arguments may be further divided into cosmological and teleological. Cosmological arguments move from one or more contingent beings (or contingent characteristics of beings) present in human experience to a being which is necessary and self-sufficient. Teleological arguments make a similar transition from conditioned to condition; however, they single out a particular variety of contingency, namely order and design. That is, the order and design evident in our experience of nature are not self-explanatory, they are contingent; from this an orderer or designer is inferred. (There is, perhaps, one further type of demonstration which is exemplified in Pascal's "Wager" and James "Will to believe"; however, such proofs are not properly arguments for the existence of God; they are rather arguments for the viability of belief in God. Their referent is epistemological, concerning the possibility of knowledge, not ontological, concerning the actuality of beings. We will consider these arguments in chapter seven.)

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[1] Our consideration of the a priori arguments will be found below, pp. 156-213.

We will begin our discussion of a posteriori arguments with a consideration of the five ways recorded by St. Thomas in the Summa Theologiae. Lest it be objected that the proofs of St. Thomas are "dated" and no longer to be understood as decisive, allow me to quote a contemporary philosopher: "The five ways indicated by Thomas Aquinas . . . stand firm in spite of all criticism."[2]

These five arguments will be seen to share a common structure. This structure will be tested against other a posteriori arguments

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[2] Jacques Maritain, Approaches to God, trans. Peter O'Reilly (New York, 1954), p. 17. Cf. Etienne Gilson, Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, trans. L. K. Shook, C.S.B. (New York, 1956), p. viii. "I do not say of Thomas that he was right, but that he is right." See also R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., God His Existence and His Nature, trans. Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B. (St. Louis and London, 1934), pp. 18-20.

(in particular the cosmological argument of Copleston and the teleological argument of Paley) in an attempt to show that this structure is adequate to all such proofs. We will then analyze that structure in order to learn *how* the proofs function and to discover their most fundamental premises.

Section I: Structure of the proofs.

The proofs for the existence of God which are recorded in the writings of St. Thomas (the five ways and the *De Ente* proof[3]) may be reduced to the following outline in which the numerals identify the steps common to each proof and the letters refer to the particular expression of these steps in each proof. (Thus the first way may be extracted by referring to "A" in each of the steps, etc.)

1. *There exist*:
    - A. Things in motion.
    - B. An order of efficient causes.
    - C. Things for which it is possible to be and not to be.
    - D. Beings more and less good, true, etc.
    - E. Unintelligent beings which act purposefully.
    - F. Beings whose existence is distinct from their essence.
2. *It is necessary that*:
    - A. Whatever is moved be moved by another; no infinite regress.
    - B. No thing can be the efficient cause of itself; no infinite regress.
    - C. There must be something the existence of which is necessary (first part); this is either caused or not caused (second part); no infinite regress.
    - D. More and less true imply a most true as their cause.
    - E. Whatever is directed must have a director.
    - F. "Everything which exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself"; no infinite regress.

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[3] These arguments may be found in S.T. I, q.2, a.3 and *De Ente et Essentia* in *Opuscula Philosophica*, Marietti edn. (Romae, 1954), Chapter 4, para. 26-27. Other formulations may be found in *Summa Contra Gentiles* in *Opera Omnia*, Leonine edn., 16 vols. (Romae, 1882-1948), I, 13, and *Compendium theologiae ad fratrem Reginaldum socium suum carissimum*, eds. Frette and Mare, 34 vols. (Paris, 1871-80), Chap. 3.

3. Therefore:

   A. There must be a first mover.
   B. There must be a first efficient cause.
   C. There must be a self-necessary being.
   D. There must be a supreme being.
   E. There must be an "orderer."
   F. There must be a being whose essence and existence are identical.

4. This we call God.

Reviewing the above outline the structure of the arguments becomes apparent: First, a synthetic (a posteriori) premise which both asserts existence of something and attributes a property to it, a property which reveals a need of explanation by virtue of some extrinsic thing. E.g., there exist things in motion. Second, one or more analytic (a priori) propositions such as, "Whatever is moved is moved by another," whereby the argument moves by necessity from the first premise to its desired conclusion. Third, from premises one and two the argument concludes to the existence of a self-sufficient being, for instance, "first mover," or "supreme being." Fourth, the identification of the self-sufficient being of the third step with God; thus the argument reaches its conclusion in the recognition of a quid nominis Dei, "This we call God." In summary, the logical structure of the cosmological arguments may be represented:

1. $\exists x$
2. $x \rightarrow y$
3. $\exists y$
4. $y = \text{God}$

Section II: How the proofs work.

Clearly the proofs hinge on their first and second premises which combine to conclude to the existence of God characterized in a given way, such as "first mover." It is in the consideration of the first and second premises that the argument will be won or lost. We will subsequently devote a full chapter to the analysis and discussion of each of these pivotal premises, but it would not be out of place at this point to engage in a brief consideration of their roles. It is obvious from the most cursory consideration of the above logical form that the movement from $\exists x$ to $\exists y$ is contingent on the major (second) premise, $x \rightarrow y$. I propose therefore to begin by examining the major premise.

Major premise

The various major premises are presented as necessary propositions.[4] If we were correct in identifying their logical form as "If x then y" (e.g., if moved then mover) it now remains to identify the values of x and y. The outline presented on pages sixteen and seventeen shows that these values vary from one proof to another. Hence, in the first way x equals "moved" and y equals "mover," from which we obtain "If moved then mover." In the De Ente argument x equals "exists through another" and y equals "exists through itself." Thus, "If something exists through another then something exists through itself."

The various necessary (a priori) propositions of the major premise may be reduced to the more general form: the per aliud implies the per se.[5] That is to say, that which exists through another (a thing in motion, an order of efficient causes, possible beings, degrees of being, things acting for an end, or a thing in which existence is distinct from essence) implies, in the sense of "requires as its only adequate cause," that which exists through itself (first mover, first efficient cause, self-necessary being, supreme being, intelligent director, or thing in which essence and existence are identical). Each of these particular formulations is an instance of this more general proposition. The question we must ultimately ask is what are the grounds for the movement from the per aliud to the per se?

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[4] See Bertrand Russell and F. C. Copleston, "A Debate on the Existence of God" in The Existence of God, ed. John Hick (New York and London, 1964), p. 170.

[5] See Russell and Copleston, p. 170, and Gilson, St. Thomas, p. 81.

Coupled with the proposition, "the per aliud implies the per se," is the assertion, "Hic autem non est procedere in infinitum," i.e., an infinite regress is impossible. This proposition is explicitly stated in the first, second, and third ways as well as in the De Ente proof; its function and relation to the per aliud/per se principle will be more fully discussed when we take up the major premise at length in chapter three.

Minor Premise

As noted in the outline on pages sixteen and seventeen, the minor premise asserts existence of some being, and focuses on a feature, e.g., motion, which, in the work of justifying the major premise, is to reveal itself as in need of being explained by another. In other words, it serves to posit the per aliud which is contained in the major premise. If we grant that the major premise moves from "conditioned" (per aliud) to "condition" (per se) then it is clear that the minor premise must serve to affirm the existence of the per aliud.

There are two functions performed by the minor premise. First, the assertion, based on experience, of existence, "There exist. . . ." It is because of the experiential nature of this first premise that these proofs can be referred to as a posteriori; the verification of this premise is in experience.[6] It is often objected against the a priori, or ontological arguments that one cannot conclude to anything which is not previously contained in the premises of the proof. Hence the conclusion "God exists" of an ontological argument can be successful only if God is originally defined as existing--which would of course be begging the question. One of the major strengths of an a posteriori demonstration is that it is able to vouchsafe existence by means of experience and hence is able to escape the accusation of circularity. Second, in addition to affirming existence, the minor premise must serve to identify a feature which will reveal itself, in the justification of the major premise, to be an instance of the per aliud. Not all the features of a thing require explanation by something extrinsic, e.g., man's risibility. Moreover, the feature selected must be adequately universal; it must apply to all things not God. For example, motion, mentioned above, would not be adequately universal in an ontology which admitted non-material entities such as the human soul or angels. Adequate universality is necessary because the God to which theists wish to conclude is defined, among other things, as the cause of all beings other than himself. If, therefore, this *per aliud* feature is not present in all things not God (i.e., some things would remain which would not have been caused by God), then the *per se* concluded to will not be the cause of all things--and hence would not be acknowledged as God.

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[6] "Experience" may be understood in two ways, both of which are present in cosmological arguments. The first is "sensory experience" which is appealed to the five ways; the second is non-sensual, or "inner" experience of an idea which employed in Maritain's sixth way and in Descartes' third Meditation.

Given these two premises, "If *per aliud* then *per se*," and "There exists a *per aliud*," the theist is able to conclude, "There exists a *per se*." However, this conclusion is not without its difficulties. There is a most significant debate now being waged as to the possibility of a *per se*, i.e., whether or not this *quid nominis Dei* is itself tenable. If, as some maintain, the concept of God, of a *per se*, is unintelligible or self-contradictory, then any proofs which conclude to such a concept will be voided. Moreover, if the concept of God is in fact an unintelligible one it will be impossible even to discuss God's existence or non-existence, let alone attempt formal arguments. If the notion of an uncaused necessary being is nonsense then there is little point in speculating whether or not such a being exists. The point is well taken and a response must be made. Gilson suggests[7] that the proofs recorded by St. Thomas move from an assumed vague notion of God which is present in all men, and that without such a preliminary insight the proofs could never be directed to their proper end. We will subsequently[8] have occasion to explore this issue more extensively. For the present, however, it is perhaps sufficient to note that a debate has been joined, a conversation continues, and for the sake of that discussion a tentative notion of the diety has been accepted by both sides. Whether or not it makes sense to speak of a necessary being remains to be seen, but in the interim we can, in the same manner as those participating in the debate, adopt a general notion of God acceptable to both parties.

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[7] *Elements*, pp. 54, 62. See also, Maritain, *Approaches*, p. 23, St. Augustine, p. 70, and Flint, p. 20.

[8] Below, p. 94.

It is now evident that the logical formulation of the proofs suggested on page seventeen may be more adequately expressed:

1. Minor premise: There exists a per aliud. (a posteriori)
2. Major premise: The per aliud implies the per se. (a priori)
3. Conclusion: There exists a per se. (By 1 and 2)

First a minor synthetic premise whose truth is established a posteriori. Then a major premise whose necessity is evident a priori. Step one serves to identify an existing per aliud; step two demonstrates the necessity of moving from that per aliud to a per se; step three concludes to the existence of a per se. Given that, it simply remains to identify the "per se" as a quid nominis Dei and then to assert the existence of God.

Having seen that the above logical form properly expresses the structure of the demonstrations of the existence of God presented by St. Thomas, we must now test whether or not this proposed form is adequate to comprehend other a posteriori proofs.

A posteriori arguments for the existence of God have been formulated many times since Aquinas presented them in the thirteenth century. (Their origin, of course, goes back into antiquity.) Employing an analogy between the universe and a watch William Paley (1743-1805) fashioned this (teleological) a posteriori argument:

1. There exist things which are ordered towards an end, i.e., there exist evidences of design.[9]

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[9] Paley, pp. 13, 20.

2. "There cannot be design without a designer; contrivance without a contriver; order without choice; arrangement without anything capable of arranging. . . ."[10] No infinite regress.[11] "Upon the whole, after all the schemes and struggles of a reluctant philosophy, the necessary resort is to a diety. The marks of design are too strong to be gotten over. Design must have had a designer. That designer must have been a person. That person is God."[12]

Note how these two steps correspond with our analysis of the five ways. This correspondence is even more pronounced in this contemporary statement of the argument by F. C. Copleston.[13] (Here I will preface Copleston's statements with the proposed logical structure.)

1. [There exists a per aliud.]
   "There are at least some beings in the world which do not contain in themselves the reason for their existence."

2. [Per aliud implies per se.]
   Contingent objects must have a reason external to themselves. This reason is either caused or not caused. No infinite regress. "We must come to a being which contains within itself the reason for its own existence."[14]

In each of the above arguments (which are typical of all such demonstrations) the first, or minor, premise posits an existing per aliud and the second (major) premise then argues the necessity of proceeding from this *per aliud* to a *per se*.

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[10] Ibid., p. 8.

[11] Ibid., p. 9.

[12] Ibid., p. 44.

[13] Russell and Copleston, pp. 168-169.

[14] Note the similarity between this statement and that of Demea: "Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence." It cannot be the cause of itself. "We must either go on tracing an infinite succession . . . or must at last have recourse to some ultimate cause, that is necessarily existent." An infinite regress is absurd. "We must therefore have recourse to a necessarily existent being, who carries the reason of his existence in himself." David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (Indianapolis, 1947), pp. 188-189.

It appears to me that all *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God are adequately comprehended by this logical form. We will, in the pages ahead, be presenting still other formulations of *a posteriori* proofs and showing that they reveal this logical form; however, it would not be appropriate (or possible) for me to attempt to defend this assertion by cataloging all possible expressions of cosmological and teleological demonstrations. I will instead shift the burden of "disproof" to my reader and ask that the above analysis be granted until some exception is discovered.

The general form of the cosmological arguments for the existence of God:

1. *Per aliud*.
2. *Per aliud* → *per se*.
3. *Per se*.

provides an excellent outline for the construction of our study. We will devote a chapter to each of these moments in the argument. We will consider the theist's defense of the inference, "If *per aliud* then *per se*," then we will examine his notion of "*per aliud*," and finally we will explore his understanding of "*per se*." After each of these discussions we will attempt to elucidate why the atheist refuses to accept the premises of the theist. A denial of any one of these three elements of the argument would be sufficient to explain why the atheist does not find the conclusion cogent. I believe we will find that all three are unacceptable.

We have, at this point, outlined the proofs recorded by St. Thomas (as well as those of Paley and Copleston), disclosed their common structure, and briefly examined the role of their two premises. It remains now to proceed to a more extensive examination of these two premises (there exists a per aliud; the per aliud implies the per se) in which we will attempt to understand why some rational men are forced to take exception to them. The answer to that question will no doubt depend on our penetrating to the presuppositions of each. We will begin with the major premise.

CHAPTER II

In chapter one we reduced several cosmological proofs to a standard form, which we believe is common to all _a posteriori_ arguments for the existence of God. That form consisted in three propositions: 1. There exists a _per aliud_. 2. The _per aliud_ implies the _per se_. And, 3. Therefore, there exists a _per se_. We then proposed that these three propositions be explored more fully in an effort to ascertain why the theist regards them as an acceptable argument and the non-theist does not. We begin now with a consideration of the major premise, i.e., the _per aliud_ implies the _per se_. We will ask first why theists feel this implication necessary and then we will consider whether or not any atheist could possibly dissent from it, and if so, why.

Section I: Is the implication analytic?

It is the theist's common contention that, "dependent existences imply one independent existence."[1] Copleston's argument that, "If there is a contingent being then there is a necessary being,"[2] is a clear instance of the proposition "the _per aliud_ implies the _per se_." What we wish to discover is the source (or justification) of this implication. Why does dependent existence _imply_ independent existence; on what grounds does the contingent _imply_ the necessary?[3]

[1] Flint, p. 126.

[2] Russell and Copleston, p. 170.

[3] See Flint, p. 148.

By what principle is the theist's mind forced to make the inference that "the very intuition of existence . . . Being-with-nothingness, makes the mind grasp . . . the necessity of Being-without-nothingness."[4] (One cannot but wonder why this implication is grasped by Maritain and yet is not apparent to Russell.) Whence comes this "Necessity"? Why does the theist (in this case Maritain) believe that this precarious existence in the midst of nothingness implies one that is absolute and free from nothingness?[5] We noted in Chapter I[6] Copleston's contention that this is a necessary implication; we now see Maritain making the same claim. On what grounds is it necessary to infer the per se from the per aliud? Is it necessary in and of itself (i.e., self-evident); if so it is analytic; or is its necessity dependent upon other premises? We begin by asking, Is the implication analytic?

What is meant by "analytic"? Kant defines an analytic proposition as one which "expresses nothing in the predicate but what has been already actually thought in the subject."[7] It is therefore a proposition in which the predicate "is already contained in the concept of the subject."[8] Because its predicate is contained within the concept of its subject an analytic proposition is verifiable a priori, solely by means of the law of contradiction. (To assert the subject and at the same time deny the predicate is tantamount to both asserting and denying the subject at the same time.)

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[4] Jacques Maritain, The Range of Reason (New York, 1942), p. 90. Italics mine.

[5] See Austin Farrer, Finite and Infinite (Westminster, 1943), p. 27.

[6] See above, p. 18.

[7] Kant, Prolegomena, p. 14.

[8] Ibid., p. 15. See also Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. N. K. Smith (London, 1963), p. 48.

To the theist the inference is often so immediate, so "clear and distinct," that one naturally thinks first that it is analytic or self-confirming. Indeed, when Maritain writes,

> Thus the primordial intuition of being is the intuition of solidity and inexorability of existence; and second, of the death and nothingness to which my existence is liable. And third, _in the same flash of intuition_ . . . I realize that this solid and inexorable existence . . . _implies_ . . . some absolute, irrefragable existence, completely free from nothingness and death.[9]

it is clear that he is suggesting an analytic relationship. Note that the necessary (or _per se_) is realized "in the same flash of intuition" which grasps contingency (i.e., the _per aliud_); the awareness of both "are achieved within the same unique intuition." Of course, this proposition is not analytic in the strictly formal sense of Kant (Maritain is not saying that the predicate is part of the subject), but rather in the sense that both are present in this unique primordial awareness. It is only subsequently, in what Maritain speaks of as "the second stage,"[10] that a "spontaneous reasoning" begins to unfold this intuition. St. Bonaventure also is aware of the imminence of the _per se_ in the apprehension of the _per aliud_. "God is contemplated not only _through_ [contingent beings] but also _in_ them."[11] Hartshorne goes so far as to suggest:

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[9] Maritain, _Approaches_, p. 19. Italics mine.

[10] _Ibid_.

[11] St. Bonaventure, _The Mind's Road to God_, p. 14. Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, _Vision_, p. 14. "For Thou art present to all and to each. . . ." Also, Martin Buber, _I and Thou_, trans. R. G. Smith (New York, 1958), p. 77. "No 'going beyond sense-experience' is necessary."

> What "makes" God necessary? Anything whatsoever. . . . Think God, and that requires God. Think atoms, and they require God. Think the mere possibility of atoms: that, too, requires God.[12]

Given the above definition of analyticity it is clear that to suggest that absolute existence is included in the intuition of contingent existence, or that the one is present in the other, or that the thought of the one requires the thought of the other is to suggest an analytic relationship between the per aliud and the per se.

If these theists are correct in identifying this implication as analytic, or self-confirming, then clearly no one could dissent from it any more than one could dissent from the proposition, "All bachelors are unmarried." If, then, the premise "the per aliud implies the per se" is found to be analytic there will be no question of the atheist's possibly refusing to grant it. (Of course, its acceptance will be only hypothetical, "If the per aliud then the per se"; the necessary conclusion to a per se will depend on the prior establishment of a per aliud.) Thus the central issue we must address in this section is: Is the per se present in the concept of the per aliud? If it is, then the major premise of cosmological demonstrations for the existence of God will stand secure and serve as a solid foundation upon which to construct a proof. If it is not then either the conclusion will be false, or its deduction from the per aliud will require additional premises. I intend first to show that the proposition "the per aliud implies the per se" is not analytic, then to show that additional premises are needed, and finally to identify those premises.

[12] Hartshorne, p. 104. See also p. 156.

No matter how thoroughly you analyze the concept "per aliud" you will never, by the law of contradiction alone, be able to assert "per se." "That which is in itself" is simply not contained in (and hence cannot be deduced analytically from) the concept, "that which is in another." The only conclusion one can deduce analytically from the per aliud is the aliud. That is to say, the existence of something which is per aliud, whose existence is due to or dependent on another, does explicitly entail (of itself) the present or past existence of an aliud. From the concept of that which exists through another one can analytically extract an other. (Indeed, one definition of the per aliud is that which cannot be conceived in and of itself, but rather must be thought in connection with something else.)[13] However, one cannot analytically infer from the existence of a per aliud the existence of a per se. Why? Because, although the existence of an aliud follows necessarily from the existence of a per aliud, one cannot from that alone infer anything at all about the nature of that aliud.[14] To be specific, whether the aliud necessitated by the concept of the per aliud is itself a per aliud or a per se remains an open question. But cosmological arguments do not simply move from the per aliud to an aliud; they conclude to the necessary existence of a unique aliud, one which exists through itself, i.e., which is per se. It is one thing to reason from the per aliud to an aliud, e.g., from moved to mover; it is quite another to reason from the per aliud to a characteristic of that aliud, e.g., from moved to per se mover. In the premise "the per aliud implies the per se" we have a proposition of the form "If X then Y." Some maintain that this instance of the implication is guaranteed by the law of contradiction. It is true that the law of contradiction would be sufficient to assure, "If caused X then cause Y." But it is an entirely separate issue as to whether Y is itself caused (per aliud) or uncaused (per se)--an issue which cannot be ajudicated solely on the basis of X and the law of contradiction. The limited value of a solely analytic deduction is apparent in all the proofs. We have seen that from "moved" one can deduce "mover," but not "self-mover." And from "caused" one can deduce only "cause," not "uncaused cause." The case is the same with "caused existence" and "cause of existence," with "ordered" and "orderer," etc. What I am suggesting is that an absolute being which exists in and through itself cannot be deduced solely from the given existence of contingent beings. Therefore, the major premise of cosmological arguments for the existence of God is not analytic. The per aliud entails only an aliud; there is no necessity that this aliud be a per se. In fact, the per aliud may imply an aliud which is itself per aliud, etc. We began by asking whether the major premise of cosmological proofs is analytic; we have concluded that it is not.

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[13] See Benedict Spinoza, On the Improvement of the Understanding in Works of Spinoza, trans. R. H. Elwes (New York, 1951), II, pp. 34, 37.

[14] See below, pp. 31, 34-37.

The time has come to raise the question: If, as we have argued, the proposition "the per aliud implies the per se" is not analytic, then why do theists find it so cogent? It is precisely this question which has not been adequately pursued in the past. The critic cannot simply sit back at this juncture, light up his pipe, and begin to cast his glance towards new antagonists confident that the battle has been won. If anything is clear in the history of this debate it is that theists are particularly impervious to such superficial attacks. The problem is that we have not yet penetrated to the core of the theist's argument. Recall now the maxim of Mill: we cannot rest in complete assurance until we are able to "account for the existence of the opposite opinion." If we stop here we will have failed to raise the one question upon which we as philosophers so rightly pride ourselves, namely "WHY?" Our curiosity must here be aroused. Aquinas (and his modern defenders Gilson and Maritain _et al_.) was no fool. If we stop our inquiry here we will be resting content with a St. Thomas adequately described as "the dumb ox." I, for one, am not satisfied with that; I want to know _why_ Aquinas, and the theistic community which he represents, believes the _per se_ to be necessarily implied by the _per aliud_.

We have argued above that the transition from the _per aliud_ (contingent) to the _per se_ (necessary) could not be secured analytically. The importance of this conclusion cannot be overemphasized. It was noted that if the major premise is not analytic, then either the proof will be unacceptable or the deduction of a _per se_ from a _per aliud_ will require more than the mere assertion of a _per aliud_. It is my contention that the _per aliud/per se_ premise is not absolute (or analytic) and that it stands in need of an argument. Hartshorne to the contrary, we have argued that the thought of the _per aliud_ does not require the thought of the _per se_. I will now argue that the existence of a "_per se_" does follow from the existence of a "_per aliud_," given additional premises; it is however only the addition of these propositions which allows theists to conclude to a per se. Without them it is impossible to deduce the per se from the per aliud. If the major premise of cosmological arguments for the existence of God is not analytic, and yet is to be maintained as necessary, additional premises must be supplied. We must now try to discern the other premises which do in fact support the theist's conclusion to a necessary being.

Section II: Is the implication causal?

Because the implication "per aliud/per se" is not self-evident an argument must be discovered whereby the per se may be deduced from the per aliud, if this implication is to be maintained. It is most often suggested that the presupposed argument is causal, i.e., that theists rely on the principle of causality to secure the transition from per aliud (effect) to per se (cause). Gilson, for instance, notes of Aquinas' cosmological demonstrations that, "they all make use of the causal inference."[15] This observation is borne out in the proofs themselves. If one returns to Aquinas' discussion of the demonstration of the existence of God one notes his suggestion that demonstration may be made in two ways. The first is propter quid which moves from a knowledge of the cause to a knowledge of the effect; the other is quia, which moves from effect to cause. Aquinas rejects the first on the grounds that we have no knowledge of God's nature and hence cannot use it as a basis for our inferences. He chooses instead the quia demonstration. Hence, in the demonstrations presented by Aquinas (and in all cosmological arguments) the proof moves from *per aliud* (effect) to *per se* (cause): "Ex quolibet autem effectu potest demonstrari propriam causam eius esse . . . quia, cum effectus dependeant a causa, posito effectu necesse est causam praeexistere."[16] Why is such an inference possible? Because, as Aquinas conceives it, "the term cause implies some influence on the being of the thing caused."[17] Consequently, in the proposition, "the *per aliud* implies the *per se*," the *per aliud* is understood to be an effect from which, by means of the principle of causality, one moves to the *per se* which is its cause. This major premise in cosmological proofs for the existence of God may then, perhaps, be understood as a transition from conditioned (effect) to condition (cause).

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[15] Gilson, St. Thomas, p. 76. Cf. Flint, p. 64. "Theistic inference clearly involves the principle of causality."

We have thus far argued that the deduction of a *per se* from a given *per aliud* is not possible on merely analytic grounds (Section I) and that additional premises must be discovered if the cogency of the inference is to be saved. We have now suggested that the deduction may in fact be accomplished through the principle of causality (as opposed to that of contradiction alone). We must now ask: Is the principle of causality sufficient to move from the *per aliud* to the *per se*?

Our answer here must clearly be no. As in our consideration of the analytic approach, it is evident that one can conclude by 7
means of the principle of causality to the present or past existence of a cause from a given effect, but one cannot conclude, solely by

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[16] S.T., I, q.2, a.2. See also Paley, p. 37.

[17] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John Rowan (Chicago, 1961), V., L. 1: C.751.

means of causality, to any knowledge of the nature of that cause.[18] Consider the argument St. Thomas presents in De Ente. There it is maintained (by means of the man and phoenix argument) that in all natural beings, the act of existing is accidental to the essence or quiddity.[19] Since the form or quiddity of a being cannot be the efficient cause of its existing, everything whose act of existing is accidental to its nature must have its act of existing from another. "Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res, cuius est aliud quam natura sua, habeat esse ab alio."[20] The argument is twofold: first it is established that existence is per accidens, or accidental, to essence; second that such beings therefore exist per aliud, and that there must, therefore, be another, an aliud. This is perfectly acceptable as far as it goes, but it does not go as far as a per se. Further argumentation will be required to demonstrate that this aliud is a per se. Similarly in the case of Paley's teleological argument; the principle of causality underlies only the move from the per aliud to an aliud. "But whatever includes marks of contrivance, whatever in its constitution testifies design, necessarily carries us to something beyond itself, to some other being, to a designer prior to and out of itself."[21] Other arguments will have to be supplied before Paley can demonstrate that this other is per se. Here again we are able to move

[18] Unless it be the limited knowledge that Descartes suggests, namely that the cause must have at least as much reality as the effect.

[19] St. Thomas, De Ente, Chap. 4, para. 26.

[20] Ibid., para. 27.

[21] Paley, p. 36.

from the _per aliud_ to the _aliud_, but we cannot, solely on the grounds of the principle of causality, conclude that this _aliud_ is _per se_. In fact it would be a clear perversion of the principle of causality if it were employed to conclude to a cause infinitely greater than the effect. If the proofs relied solely on a causal axiom, they could not possibly proceed from _per aliud_ to _per se_ since, as Aquinas specifically notes, the cause must be proportioned to the effect. "Per effectus non proportionatos causae, non potest perfecta cognitio de causa haberi."[22] To put this objection in more contemporary terms, it is perhaps legitimate to argue _quia_ (from effect to cause), but only to a sufficient cause--one cannot go beyond postulating in the cause a degree of being _sufficient_ to cause the being of the effect. It is possible that the effects noted may be sufficiently explained by other causes which are themselves _per aliud_, i.e., by other natural beings. What I am suggesting is that the principle of causality is adequate to allow the transition from effect to cause, from the _per aliud_ to an _aliud_; it is not sufficient, however, to justify the conclusion that the cause of this contingent being is itself a necessary being. Causality does not justify the conclusion of a _first cause_. We can employ this principle to conclude, "If _caused_ X then _cause_ Y," but it is a different issue as to whether or not Y itself is caused or not caused--an issue which cannot be resolved solely through the principle of causality. As we disclosed in Section I, it is one thing to reason from an effect (_per aliud_) to a cause, and it is quite another to reason to a characteristic of that cause, namely that it is *per se*. To do the latter one could no longer rely solely on the principle of causality but would have to employ additional premises. In other words, we reach here the same problem we did in our consideration of the suggestion that the inference was analytic. We can conclude from effect to cause, but that cause may itself be an effect of a prior cause, etc.

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[22] S.T., I, q.2, a.2, ad.3.

The only exception to the above argument would be a *per aliud* such that only a *per se* could be a sufficient, or proper, cause. Suppose only an infinite cause is sufficient to explain the given effect. It is at least conceivable that there be an effect, a *per aliud*, of such a nature that it could not be except in dependence on a cause which is *per se*. This is, in fact, the theists' position; they argue that the universe as a whole is such a *per aliud*; that the universe is an effect such that only a *per se* could possibly be a sufficient cause. Since this must be established if we are to conclude to a *per se*, an argument must be provided to demonstrate both that the universe is an effect and that it could only be caused by a *per se*. The argument to this effect is founded on the impossibility of an infinite regress--to which we now turn.

Section III: The impossibility of an infinite regress.

If we are correct in maintaining the inference "*per aliud/per se*" cannot be achieved solely on the grounds of causality, then it would seem that one of two things must follow: either the cosmological proofs used by Aquinas and other theists do rely solely on this principle and hence are not conclusive, or they are conclusive but some other premise or premises must be added.

Let us look again at the proofs. Aquinas does not argue:

1. There exists a per aliud.
2. "If the effect exists the cause must pre-exist."
3. Therefore there exists a per se.

If he did one could well understand his being rejected out of hand. How then is the causal inference, which Aquinas and other theists admittedly use in their cosmological arguments, employed? Given the first premise, "There exists a per aliud (or effect)," Aquinas uses the principle of causality only to demonstrate that it must have had a cause. For instance, consider the first way, which as Aquinas notes, is "most manifest." The first premise is stated as, "in the world some things are in motion"; given this synthetic a posteriori premise Aquinas then argues, "Whatever is moved must be moved by another." He does not (and indeed could not) say at this point that the other must be per se, only that there must be another. His inference is the perfectly legitimate one we suggested above, namely "If the per aliud, then the aliud." The same limited inference is present in the second way; after stating that, "In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes," and arguing that, "There is no case known . . . in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself," the proof concludes to the necessity of an aliud. It does not, however, at this point establish that aliud as per se. To do so will require a further argument. There can be no question about these proofs being causal in the vicious sense of moving from a sensory effect to a transcendent non-sensory cause; the proofs, at this point at least, do not even violate Kant's maxim that, "The pure concepts of the understanding [such as the principle of causality] can never admit of transcendental but *always* only of *empirical* employment."[23] Kant and others believe the category of causality may be employed only to relate phenomena; it may not legitimately be used to move from the sensual to the non-sensual, from the finite to the infinite. But, at this point, even if this view of causality be granted (and it is certainly not St. Thomas' view), the principle of causality in the cosmological arguments is not being used in this illegitimate way; it functions only to deduce a cause from an effect, an *aliud* from a *per aliud*; it is not here used to deduce a *per se*.

If this be in fact the case, then we are little further than we were at the outset; we still have not penetrated to the core of the theist's demonstration of the existence of God. As noted at the conclusion of Section I, either the inference, the *per aliud* implies the *per se*, is justified by premises other than analyticity or causality, or else it is not conclusive.

How, then, if the transition is not achieved solely on the grounds of causality, does the theist move from *per aliud* to *per se*? I would suggest that it is a deduction which is contingent on several (supposedly necessary) premises only one of which is causality. We began with the given existence of a *per aliud*. From this "being which is through another" the principle of causality was used to conclude to the necessary existence of that other. This is apparent in Aquinas' "whatever is moved is moved by another," or "nothing can be the efficient cause of itself." (It might even be suggested, as we argued in Section I, that this inference is simply analytic, i.e., that "aliud" is included in the notion of "per aliud.") So far, so good. However, we noted in Section II that causality alone was insufficient to disclose anything as to the nature of this other and in particular that it was insufficient to reveal whether the other was itself a per aliud or a per se. That a per aliud requires an aliud is sufficiently clear on the grounds of the principle of causality; what is not sufficiently clear is that this aliud must be a per se. The problem is that, given the necessity of an aliud, there are two possibilities; either the aliud is a per aliud, or it is a per se. Confronted with this disjunction the theist must demonstrate that the aliud is a per se. I.e., he must show that the per aliud is not adequately explained by an aliud which itself depends on an aliud which depends on an aliud, ad infinitum.[24] Our question must be: "How does the theist demonstrate that the aliud must be a per se?"

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[23] Kant, *Pure Reason*, p. 264.

I believe that we can find at least a suggestion of the answer to our question in the Summa Contra Gentiles where Aquinas writes that according to the reasoning of Aristotle it is not possible to proceed to infinity in a series of causes. "Sed in causis non est procedere in infinitum, ut supra probatum est per rationem Aristotelis."[25] To conclude from the per aliud to the per se the theist needs the additional premise, "Non est procedere in infinitum," an infinite regress is impossible. Gilson reaches the same conclusion in his analysis of cosmological arguments, "The necessity for a first cause /per se/ is based on the impossibility of going back to infinity in an ordered series of causes and effects."[26] It is the admission of this premise which allows the theist to terminate the regressus ad infinitum which remains a possibility if one employs only the principle of causality. Without this prohibition the theist would be forced to admit the possibility that the per aliud may require an aliud which requires an aliud in turn, etc. It is only by means of this premise asserting the impossibility of an infinite regress that the cosmological argument is able to conclude to a necessary being, "Ergo oportet ponere aliquid quod sit necesse esse."[27] It is only by the addition of this premise that the per aliud implies the per se.

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[24] See P. T. Geach, "Aquinas," in G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, Three Philosophers (Ithaca, New York, 1961), pp. 109-117, for an excellent treatment of the problem of a regress.

[25] C.G., I, 15. See also Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle, pp. 299-300, 316-329.

I would suggest therefore that the cosmological argument may be more fully stated as follows:

1. There exists a per aliud.
2. The per aliud implies the per se.
    a. The per aliud explicitly entails an aliud.
    b. The aliud is either a per aliud or a per se.
    c. If per aliud, then infinite regress.
    d. No infinite regress.
    e. Therefore not per aliud.
    f. Therefore per se.

The above outline should be understood as follows. First, the existence of a contingent being is asserted a posteriori. Then one causally infers from this effect the necessity of a cause. By the law of excluded middle it is necessary that this cause be either a per aliud or a per se, i.e., either caused or not caused. Given this disjunction there are two possibilities: if the *aliud* is a *per se* we have arrived at God, since God is by definition "*per se*," and the proof is complete; if however the *aliud* is itself a *per aliud* (i.e., a contingent being) we have obviously not arrived at God. If the *aliud* is a *per aliud* we will have to inquire into its cause, and if its cause is itself a *per aliud* we will have to inquire into its cause, etc. And if the only kind of cause (*aliud*) allowed is one which is itself a *per aliud*, it will necessarily follow that the series will be a *regressus ad infinitum*. There will be no last term because the only terms admitted will be those which presuppose a prior being. Therefore, given this disjunction, the next premise, "An infinite regress is impossible," (which is usually overt but occasionally covert) functions to exclude one member of the disjunction. If in each regressing instance the possibility remains that the cause is itself an effect, so long as this alternative is present, then the argument cannot terminate in God. By maintaining that an infinite regress is impossible the theist may conclude that the cause of the per aliud he has sensually affirmed cannot ultimately be a *per aliud* and therefore must ultimately be a *per se*; whence comes the conclusion "There exists a *per se*." For example, we saw above (p. 35) that the causal argument in St. Thomas' *De Ente* is actually limited to the conclusion that the *per aliud* (a being whose existence is accidental to its essence) requires as an efficient cause of its existence an *aliud*. We said then that a further argument would be required to establish that *aliud* as a *per se*. It is the impossibility of an infinite regress that makes it possible for the *De Ente* proof to conclude to a *per se*. St. Thomas argues that there must be

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[26] Gilson, St. Thomas, p. 67.

[27] C.G., I, 15.

a subsistent existence, i.e., a per se, "oportet quod sit aliqua res, quae sit causa essendi omnibus rebus, eo quod ipsa est esse tantum." Why? "Alias iretur in infinitum in causis."[28]

To summarize, the transition from the per aliud to the per se is accomplished in the following way:

1. The per aliud implies an aliud. Or the effect implies a cause. (A priori, by the principle of causality.)
2. This "other" must be either per aliud or per se, i.e., caused or not caused. (A priori, by the law of excluded middle.)
3. If per aliud, then infinite regress. (A priori, by definition.)
4. No infinite regress in causes.
5. Therefore not per aliud. (By 3 and 4)
6. Therefore the aliud must ultimately be a per se. (By 2 and 5)

The argument is not simply analytic, nor is it wholly causal; it operates through the union of a causal principle and the prohibition of an infinite regress.

We have argued in Section III that the proofs recorded by St. Thomas cannot proceed from the per aliud to the per se as long as the possibility of a regressus ad infinitum remains. But it must not be forgotten that we are here considering these proofs not so much for their own sake as for the well-thought-out example they provide of cosmological proofs in general. Before continuing it would seem advisable to point out, if only in a cursory way, the presence of this prohibition of an infinite regress in other theistic demonstrations for the existence of God.

One notes it first in Aquinas' fellow scholastic Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308):

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[28] De Ente, Chap. 4, para. 27.

> We shall either go on ad infinitum so that each thing in reference to what precedes it in the series will be second; or we shall reach something that is prior to it. However an infinity in the ascending order is impossible.[29]

The Subtle Doctor here presents a clear statement of the disjunction we pointed to earlier; it is obvious that it is only the principle of the impossibility of an infinite regress that resolves it. Slightly later we note the same prohibition in William of Ockham's (c. 1280-1349) proof:

> If, however, this preservative cause is produced by something else. . . . Either this must go on ad infinitum, or we must stop at some being which conserves without being conserved. . . . But we cannot go on ad infinitum in the order of preservative causes.[30]

A similar statement is found in Descartes' (1596-1650) cosmological proof in Meditations III where he writes "although an idea may give rise to another idea, this regress cannot, nevertheless, be infinite; we must in the end reach a first idea."[31] In Samuel Clark's A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God published in 1705 we find:

> Either there has always existed one unchangeable and independent being . . . or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings . . . which latter supposition is so very absurd that. . . .[32]

William Paley (1743-1805) also relies on the impossibility of an infinite regress in his famous Natural Theology of 1802:

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[29] Duns Scotus, Philosophical Writings, trans. Allen Wolter (Indianapolis, 1962), p. 43.

[30] William of Ockham, Philosophical Writings, trans. P. Boehner (Indianapolis, 1957), p. 137.

[31] Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. Veitch (LaSalle, Illinois, 1966), p. 51.

[32] Clarke, p. 150.

> Nor is anything gained by running the difficulty farther back, that is by supposing the watch before us [Paley has cited the discovery of a watch, which he will argue is analagous to the discovery of order and purpose in the universe, as a clear instance of design and contrivance which must require a cause.] to have been produced from another watch, that from a former, and so on indefinitely. Our going back ever so far brings us no nearer to the least degree of satisfaction. . . . It is in vain, therefore, to assign a series of such causes or to allege that a series may be carried back to infinity.[33]

Still more recently, in Robert Flint's Theism (1889) the disjunction between a per se and an infinite series of per alia is dismissed on the grounds that "the human mind universally and instantaneously rejects it [an infinite regress] as inconceivable, unthinkable, self-contradictory, absurd."[34] Lest it be thought that the presence of this prohibition of an infinite regress is characteristic only of past cosmological demonstrations and that it is no longer to be found in contemporary proofs, we will conclude by citing its presence in a contemporary. We turn here to Copleston and his cogent statement of the theist's argument as found in the famous Russell-Copleston debate of 1948. After noting that contingent beings exist, and that they must therefore be caused by another being (i.e., that the per aliud implies an aliud), Copleston argues:

> This being is either itself the reason for its own existence, or it is not. [I.e., the aliud is either a per aliud or a per se.] If it is, well and good. If it is not, then we must proceed farther. But if we proceed to infinity in that sense, then there's no explanation of existence at all.[35]

What is the purpose of this cursory historical glance at cosmological demonstrations of the existence of God? Clearly we

[33] Paley, pp. 9-11.

[34] Flint, p. 120.

[35] Russell and Copleston, p. 169.

cannot inductively prove that all cosmological arguments incorporate this prohibition; we have presented this list merely to invite the observation of its frequency. I am not unaware that there are many attempts (now fashionable among modern proponents) to forge demonstrations which do not incorporate this Achille's heel, but we will have to consider their efforts later. For the present let us simply note that the explicit prohibition of an infinite regress is common to many cosmological proofs for the existence of God. Before turning to the central question of why the prohibition of an infinite regress is so common in cosmological proofs (i.e., the question of what purpose does it serve) let us quickly review the reasons put forth by theists in support of the impossibility of an infinite regress. Clearly, if we are correct in suggesting that the deduction of the per se from a per aliud is contingent on the impossibility of an infinite regress, it would seem incumbent upon us to attempt to discern exactly why an infinite regress is impossible. Two types of reasons are given.

The first argument proceeds according to the concept of an infinite regress. It operates on the assumption that from a logical impossibility a negative ontological conclusion may be drawn; for example, since a round square is a logical impossibility (i.e., is self-contradictory, cannot be thought) it is said also to be an ontological impossibility (i.e., there could not be such a thing). This argument maintains that an infinite series of contingent beings is unintelligible or self-contradictory or that it does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question. We found this expressed in Flint's assertion that "the human mind universally and instantaneously rejects it as inconceivable, unthinkable, self-contradictory, absurd."[36] In this contention Flint is but echoing Clarke who also maintained that the concept of an infinite regress is self-contradictory: "it is a flat contradiction to suppose an infinite series of dependent effects, none of which are necessary in themselves or self-existent."[37] It was Paley, you will recall, who suggested that recourse to an infinite regress is not a sufficient explanation. "Our going back ever so far brings us no nearer to the least degree of satisfaction."[38]

The second, more significant, objection to an infinite regress has to do with the being of things rather than what is or is not palatable to the human intellect. Here it is suggested that the totality of contingent beings, even if infinite, requires a cause. It is in this vein that Aristotle writes "Now since of an infinite number of terms there is not a first, the first in this series will not exist, and therefore no following term will exist."[39] The argument here is that a series of dependent beings is contingent upon the first member of that series, but since there is no first member in an infinite series, it will not have the required cause and hence could not exist. Aquinas expresses the argument as it is applied to motion this way:

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[36] Flint, p. 120. Cf. p. 109. "[An uncreated universe] . . . is not only as mysterious as the self-existence of Deity but millions of millions times more mysterious."

[37] Clarke, p. 149.

[38] Paley, p. 9. Cf. St. Bonaventura, p. 24. "Our intellect cannot reach the point of fully understanding any of the created beings unless it be favored by the understanding of the purest, most actual, most complete, and Absolute Being."

[39] Aristotle, Metaphysics, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, trans. R. McKeon (New York, 1941), 1068b4.

1. In an ordered series of movers when the first mover is removed no other mover will move or be moved.
2. But in an infinite series of movers there will be no first mover.
3. Therefore none of the other members of the series will be moved, and thus nothing in the world will be moved.

> In moventibus et motis ordinatis, quorum scilicet unum per ordinem ab alio movetur, hoc necesse est inveniri, quod, remoto primo movente vel cessante a motione, nullum aliorum movebit neque movebitur: quia primum est causa movendi omnibus aliis. Sed si sint moventia et mota per ordinem in infinitum, non erit aliquod primum movens, sed omnia erunt quasi media moventia. Ergo nullum aliorum poterit moveri. Et sic nihil movebitur in mundo.[40]

In commenting on this proof Gilson writes: ". . . [given an infinite regress] there still would be no single cause to account for this whole structure of things in motion."[41] It is further argued that a totality of dependent beings, even if it be infinite, must itself be dependent. Paley, for instance, maintains that "a chain composed of an infinite number of links can no more support itself than a chain composed of a finite number of links."[42] And Clarke argues that "Where no part is necessary, it is manifest *the whole* cannot be necessary."[43] Copleston tried a similar argument against Russell: "If there were no necessary being, no being which must exist and cannot not exist, nothing would exist."[44] These seem then to be the most significant ontological objections to the possibility of an infinite regress. First, that if there is no first term in a series of caused beings, there will be no cause for any of the subsequent members of that series. Second, even if an infinite series of contingent beings were to be allowed, that series itself would require a cause.

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[40] C.G., I, 13.

[41] Gilson, *Elements*, p. 69.

[42] Paley, p. 9.

[43] Clarke, p. 25. Italics mine.

[44] Russell and Copleston, p. 189.

Section IV: The significance of the Infinite Regress.

We have suggested that the per aliud/per se premise of the theist's cosmological demonstrations of the existence of God is not absolute, i.e., not self-evident (Section I); we have maintained, on the contrary, that it is dependent on the principle of causality (Section II), and the impossibility of an infinite regress (Section III). We now turn to consider why the premise asserting the impossibility of a regressus ad infinitum is so crucial.

What are the theist's reasons for believing an infinite regress to be impossible? He believes that such a series of contingent beings would itself require a cause. An infinite regress of per alia is impossible precisely because "an infinite series of contingent beings will be . . . as unable to cause itself as one contingent being."[45]

At issue is whether or not one could maintain an infinite string of per alia; that is to say, whether the series as a whole must be caused (and hence would itself be per aliud). Does the series of natural caused causes itself require a cause? "Does the world explain itself, or does it lead the mind above and beyond itself?"[46]

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[45] Ibid., p. 174.

[46] Flint, p. 12.

The issue then is whether or not the universe itself is an effect. The theist believes it is, and argues from this contingency to the necessity of a transcendent cause. The importance of this presupposition cannot be overemphasized; I believe it to be the heart of the dispute between the proponents and opponents of these proofs. The assertion of the impossibility of an infinite regress serves to preclude the series of per alia which would, by its very nature, be an infinite regress. Why is such an infinite series of per alia impossible? Because the series could not be its own cause. In short, no totality composed of contingent parts can be per se. Just as its parts are contingent, it too is contingent; just as they require a cause outside themselves, it too requires a cause outside itself. From which it (allegedly) follows that the series as a whole requires a cause.

What I am suggesting is that cosmological arguments for the existence of God do not immediately rise from particular contingent beings (per alia) to the one necessary uncaused being (per se). Movement from a particular per aliud to God is not possible--nor is it in fact attempted. "The argument does not go from part to whole, but from contingent things to the equally contingent universe."[47] Those theists who believe the inference to be immediate are simply too close to see their own presuppositions. One cannot rise causally from a particular contingent being to God because it would always remain possible that that per aliud is dependent not on God, but on other natural entities. An intermediate step is necessary; it must

[47] Edward Sillem, Ways of Thinking About God (New York, 1961), p. 163.

be established that the series of natural causes cannot itself be an adequate explanation. The reason it is not (in the theist's estimation) is because the series itself must be contingent. The proofs begin by citing (a posteriori) individual contingent beings and conclude from them to the contingency of the universe as a whole. It is only after this has been established that the argument may conclude (in its second inference) to a per se which is not a part of that natural series of per alia.

Geach argues a similar thesis in Three Philosophers maintaining that the cosmological argument as presented by St. Thomas does not rise to God from particular contingent individuals, but that it must instead proceed from the contingency of the universe as a whole. "What is in fact essential to the 'Five Ways' is something tantamount to treating the world as a great big object."[48] It is his contention that the former interpretation is erroneous, that St. Thomas "did not think God could be reached by following to its end a causal chain starting from a random object."[49] It is my belief that the argument from the contingency of individuals is not wrong, but merely partial, or incomplete. The premise precluding an infinite regress functions not to conclude directly to God, but to conclude to a contingent universe (i.e., to link the two approaches which Geach suggests are opposed) from which the argument then proceeds to God.

[48] Geach, p. 112.

[49] Ibid.

To approach this distinction in still another way, the first part of the cosmological proof concludes to the per se from the per aliud by means of the impossibility of an infinite regress. But what if it be objected by the non-theist that even though the proof may have succeeded in demonstrating the necessity of a per se, it has not established that that per se must be God. It may in fact simply be the series of caused causes itself, i.e., the series of per alia. To preclude the possibility of this reply the theist must contend that this series of per alia cannot be per se. That is, that a series of beings which exist through another cannot exist through itself. The theist must proceed, therefore, if he is to demonstrate the existence of God, from the belief that the universe as a whole with causally interrelated parts requires a cause, i.e., that it is not self-explanatory.

I am proposing that there is in fact a double argument in cosmological proofs for the existence of God. The first part is as we have outlined it in Section III:

1. The per aliud implies an aliud.
2. This aliud is either a per aliud or a per se.
3. If per aliud then infinite regress.
4. No infinite regress.
5. Therefore not per aliud.
6. Therefore per se.

But even if the non-theist were to grant this, the possibility would remain that the series of per alia is itself per se. Thus it might be maintained that if it is necessary that anything which is per aliud ultimately be explained by that which is per se, it does not follow that that per se must be God--it could be the collection of individual per alia. Indeed, this is the objection which Cleanthes raises against Demea's formulation of the cosmological argument "Why may not the material universe be the necessarily existent Being?"[50] To complete the inference to God a further argument is needed:

1. The per se is either the universe or God.
2. The universe is a series of contingent beings.
3. "An infinite series of contingent beings will be . . . as unable to cause itself as one contingent being."[51]
4. Therefore the series must be caused.
5. Therefore the series is not per se.
6. Therefore the per se must be God. (By 1 and 5)

Without this second argument the inference is incomplete. The theist must, if he is lucky enough to gain the atheist's consent to the necessity of a per se, press on with a demonstration that the universe is itself per aliud and therefore cannot be the ultimate solution. This double argument is clearly seen in Flint's contention that, given the need for a first cause (per se), "it cannot be the universe itself, for that has been shown to be an effect";[52] therefore it must be God.

It might even be suggested that ultimately there is no argument between the theist and the atheist as to the necessity of a per se, that is to say the necessity of something which is not itself caused. Without such an uncaused entity there is no intellectual satisfaction. By no intellectual satisfaction I mean to suggest that one would not be able to complete the explanation; all answers would necessarily be partial--always leading to a further question. However, even if the necessity of a per se be granted the atheist understands the infinite series of per alia to be such an uncaused entity (per se) and hence he finds it an adequate explanation. The theist, believing the universe to be caused, is not able to rest content with this answer. For him the explanation is incomplete. Once again, our discussion returns to the question, "Is the universe itself per aliud or per se?"

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[50] Hume, Dialogues, p. 190. Cf. Matson, p. 75. "The world itself . . . might be the necessary Being after all."

[51] Russell and Copleston, p. 173.

[52] Flint, p. 291.

Returning again to the proofs, let us suggest how the discussion might proceed. Granted the existence of a per aliud (effect) and given the (legitimate) causal inference of an aliud, the issue becomes "What is the nature of this aliud?" As noted above, if the aliud is per se the search is over. But clearly the atheist does not believe it is. On the contrary, he argues that the aliud is itself per aliud. To be specific, in the case of the first proof both the theist and the non-theist grant that there are per alia (things in motion, etc.), and both grant that these per alia are not sufficient explanations of themselves (i.e., that a thing in motion cannot be the cause of its own movement). Both agree that a cause is required. But when the atheist maintains that the cause itself is per aliud, the theist counters with the question "What then is its cause?" His point is well-taken; if the cause itself is per aliud then it too is an effect and hence will not be a sufficient explanation of the original per aliud. In other words, the cause is limited and will itself require a cause. The atheist will continually respond with finite contingent causes, and the theist will forever question the cause of the cause. Finally, in desperation the theist points out "But even if it is granted that the series of caused causes is infinite, as you seem to maintain, the series itself will require a cause." Which is to say that the universe as a whole (as a series of contingent beings) requires an explanation. The atheist cannot help but ask, "Why?" The answer lies in the fact that the theist regards the universe as an effect. It is precisely because of this appraisal that the theist "finds no satisfaction" in the atheist's response. Why does the theist regard the universe as an effect? He believes either that the series must be caused, i.e., that it is created, an action which would clearly require a cause beyond the effect; or else he believes that an infinite series, even given its eternity (i.e., granted that no first cause is necessary), would still not be sufficient unto itself given the fact that it is composed of contingent beings. The difference between the two is evident. The atheist is content to proceed to infinity in the series of contingent causes; the theist is not. The atheist is willing to accept the series as self-explanatory; the theist is not. This confrontation is reflected quite clearly in the Russell-Copleston debate:

> Copleston: But are you going to say that we . . . shouldn't even raise the question of the existence . . . of the whole universe?
>
> Russell: Yes, I don't think there's any meaning in it at all.
>
> Copleston: An infinite series of contingent beings will be, to my way of thinking, as unable to cause itself as one contingent being. . . . Why shouldn't one raise the question of the existence of all particular objects?
>
> Russell: Because I see no reason to think there is any. I see no reason whatsoever to suppose that the total has any cause whatsoever.
>
> Copleston: I'm saying, every object has a phenomenal cause if you insist on the infinity of the series--but the series of phenomenal causes is an

> insufficient explanation of the series. Therefore, the series has not a phenomenal cause but a transcendent cause.[53]

We are suggesting that the cosmological demonstrations of the existence of God in fact proceed not simply from the individual contingent per aliud that is cited at the outset, but from the contingency of the universe itself, which is established by means of empirically manifest contingency in individuals and the impossibility of an infinite regress. It is the theist's contention not only that a particular per aliud needs an explanation, but that that explanation cannot be obtained through reference to any other contingent being because the totality of these finite beings (i.e., the universe) is itself contingent; the series of per alia requires a cause; there must be "a reason to account for the world."[54] Let us again quickly review some of the more notable proofs as they appear in the history of philosophy to disclose precisely how this total contingency of finite beings manifests itself.

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One of the earliest known examples of the cosmological argument is found in Plato's Timaeus:

> 1. "Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause."
> 2. "Was the world . . . always in existence and without beginning, or created, and had it a beginning? Created, I reply."
> 3. "Now that which is created must . . . of necessity be created by a cause."[55]

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[53] Russell and Copleston, pp. 173-176.

[54] Ewing, p. 239.

[55] Plato, Timaeus in Collected Dialogues, ed. Hamilton and Cairns (New York, 1961), 28a-c.

It is quite apparent that this proof proceeds directly from the contingency of the universe itself. To say that the world is created is to say that it is contingent and that it requires a cause. Aristotle, in positing his Prime Mover, argues that if we do not grant such a first cause, "*the world* would have proceeded out of night . . . and out of non-being."[56] What is the effect of this cause? "On such a principle, then, depend the heavens and the world of nature."[57] It is precisely the contingency of the universe that is cited by St. Paul "For the invisible things of Him *from the creation of the world* are clearly seen."[58] St. Augustine expresses the contingency of the universe most eloquently in his essay "Of True Religion" and at the same time presents a most perceptive insight about atheists:

> But those think themselves most religious who worship *the whole created universe*, that is, the world with all that is in it. . . . The whole of this together they think to be one great God, of whom all things are parts.[59]
>
> . . . it derives its existence not from itself but from the first and highest principle which is called the Father: "from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named."[60]

Note that the universe as a whole is here regarded as an effect and that what distinguishes the "idolators" is the failure to perceive that the world is *per aliud*. A similar argument may be found in St. Anselm's *Monologium*:

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[56] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072a20. Italics mine.

[57] *Ibid.*, 1072b14.

[58] Romans I:20. Italics mine.

[59] St. Augustine, pp. 65-66. Italics mine.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

> . . . we ought to inquire whether *the whole class of beings* which exist through another [i.e., are *per aliud*] derive existence from any material. But I do not doubt that all this solid world . . . consists of earth, water, fire, and air. . . . But I ask, whence this very material that I have mentioned. . . . From its own nature *the universe* cannot derive its own existence.[61]

Notice the clear statement that the universe itself exists through another, i.e., is *per aliud*. Since I have presented my own interpretation of Aquinas' proofs (and my contention that they proceed from the contingency of the universe itself), I will quote Edward Sillem's analysis. In a most interesting passage in which Sillem constructs an imaginary debate between St. Thomas and his modern critics (Kant in particular) the following are suggested as Aquinas' remarks:

> I hold that, first of all, it is necessary to establish that *the universe* is an effect, that is to say that in certain ways its whole reality depends on some other being.[62]
>
> We have argued that a *universe* made up solely of contingent things must itself be *contingent*; because it is contingent, we conclude that it is an effect; as it is an effect, it must have a cause of some kind.[63]
>
> We cannot raise the philosophical question about the cause of the existence of particular things apart from the question about the existence of all contingent things, or *the universe itself*.[64]
>
> I am contending that we must ask, that we are logically compelled to ask, what is *the cause of the universe*.[65]

[61] St. Anselm, pp. 49-50. Italics mine.

[62] Sillem, p. 126. Italics mine.

[63] *Ibid*., p. 165. Italics mine. Cf. Geach, p. 112. "Aquinas tacitly assumes, a universe entirely composed of perishable things would itself be perishable."

[64] *Ibid*., p. 164. Italics mine.

[65] *Ibid*., p. 137. Italics mine.

This interpretation would explain why Gilson, in commenting on St. Thomas' cosmological proofs, writes:

> Whoever undertakes to prove the existence of God _per ea quae facta sunt_ undertakes in advance to prove His existence as Creator of the Universe; in other words he is committed to the view that the efficient cause to which the world testifies can be none other than a creative cause.[66]

It would also shed some light on Pieper's contention that creation is the "hidden key" to an understanding of St. Thomas' philosophy:

> There is a fundamental idea by which almost all basic concepts of his vision of the world are determined: the idea of creation . . . the notion that nothing exists which is not _creatura_, except the Creator Himself.[67]

The same acknowledgement that it is as a cause of the _universe_ that the hypothesis of God is required may be found in these remarks by Samuel Clarke:

> _An infinite succession_ therefore of merely _dependent_ beings, without any original independent cause, is a series of beings that has neither necessity nor cause, nor any reason at all for its existence neither from within itself nor from without.[68]
>
> . . . where no part is necessary, it is manifest _the whole_ cannot be necessary.[69]
>
> . . . that neither the whole, nor any part of the world could exist of itself . . . is abundantly demonstrable.[70]

Note how Demea's comment that "_the whole eternal chain_ or succession, taken together . . . requires a cause or reason"[71] is reflected in

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[66] Etienne Gilson, _The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy_, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York, 1940), pp. 72-73.

[67] Josef Pieper, _The Silence of St. Thomas_, trans. Murray and O'Conner (Chicago, 1957), p. 47.

[68] Clarke, pp. 25-26. Italics mine.

[69] _Ibid._, p. 25. Italics mine.

[70] _Ibid._, p. 297.

[71] Hume, _Dialogues_, p. 188. Italics mine.

Paley's contention that "a chain composed of an infinite number of links can no more support itself than a chain composed of a finite number of links."[72] This suggestion that an infinite series of per alia cannot be uncaused is also present in Flint: "It is only such a cause [God] which is sufficient to explain the universe as we know it, and that universe is what has to be explained."[73] Because of this he defines theism as "the doctrine that the universe owes its existence and continuance in existence"[74] to God. God is defined as "the cause of which the universe is the effect."[75] We will conclude this survey by turning to a contemporary. Consider these statements by Maritain:

> . . . since the universal whole does not exist by itself, there is another Whole . . . transcendent and self-sufficient.[76]
>
> . . . since this universal whole does not exist by virtue of itself, it must be that Being-without-nothingness exists apart from it.[77]
>
> It is the entire universe . . . which is the "first mobile" in relation to the transcendent First Cause.[78]

When gathered together in this way it becomes clear that the theist believes that "the physical universe . . . calls out for some further explanation of some kind."[79] For him, "the temporal world is an essential incompleteness."[80] More instances could be cited; it is simply a matter of collection. We can, however, rest content with these illustrations that in the theist's argument it is the contingency of the universe itself which requires God. If the demonstration is to succeed, "First of all it is necessary to establish that the universe is an effect."[81]

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[72] Paley, p. 9.

[73] Flint, p. 118. Italics mine.

[74] Ibid., p. 18. Italics mine.

[75] Ibid., p. 64. Italics mine. Cf. Hume, Dialogues, p. 142. "The original cause of this universe . . . we call God."

[76] Maritain, Reason, p. 89. Italics mine.

[77] Maritain, Approaches, p. 20. Italics mine.

[78] Ibid., p. 45. Italics mine.

I am arguing, not only on the grounds of this survey but by the very logical structure of the argument, that the theist must conclude to the existence of God from the contingency of the universe and that apart from the recognition of this contingency his proofs cannot be cogent. The reason they cannot be conclusive is that, so long as the series of natural contingent beings (per alia) is understood to be self-sufficient, any individual contingent being may be adequately explained solely in terms of its membership in that series. The difference between the theist and the atheist seems to lie in the fact that the theist understands the universe as an effect while the atheist does not. Because the latter is not presented with a contingent universe he feels no need to infer a cause. The problem comes down to the determination of what is and what is not an effect. The theist is in the position of arguing that the universe as a whole is an effect; hence Gilson writes, "All Christian demonstrations of the existence of God by way of efficient causality are, in reality, so many proofs of creation."[82] Why does Gilson believe that proofs for the existence of God are actually proofs for creation? Because, as we noted above[83] these arguments must establish an effect whose only sufficient cause is a *per se*. They must, then, demonstrate that the universe as such is an effect, that it is caused; in short, that it is created (whether temporally or eternally). It is only after establishing the universe, the entire series of natural beings as an effect, a *per aliud*, that the argument *quia* can proceed to a cause which is not an effect, i.e., which is *per se*. The theist can rise from an awareness of contingent beings to God only through the contingency of the universe. The atheist does not accept this argument because he does not view the universe as an effect--and therefore does not suffer the temptation to infer a cause. How does he avoid this? By conceiving the universe as substantial, uncaused. Here is the basic issue between the theist and the non-theist; this is why the proofs are persuasive to the former but not to the latter. There is a double contingency, one of individual *per alia* and the other of the totality of *per alia*. The first is accepted by both, the second only by the theist. In its final form the question of the acceptability of the inference "the *per aliud* implies the *per se*" which is the major premise in cosmological demonstrations may be reduced to the question of a caused universe versus an uncaused one. This is a conclusion for which there is at least some sympathy in the theist community:

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[79] Ewing, p. 241.

[80] Whitehead, p. 90.

[81] Sillem, p. 126.

[82] Gilson, *Spirit*, p. 74.

[83] See above, pp. 50-51.

> If every event . . . must have a cause, to prove that *the universe* must have had a cause, we require to prove it *to have been* an event--to have had a commencement. . . . That is *the* question in the theistic argument from causality.[84]

> . . . the question between us and the atheists is not whether *the world* can possibly have been eternal but whether it can *possibly be* the original, independent, and self-existing being.[85]

Summary:

We began our consideration of the major premise of cosmological proofs for the existence of God (i.e., the *per aliud* implies the *per se*) by asking (Section I) if this proposition was analytic. We concluded that it is not. We then (Section II) undertook to discern whether or not the *per se* could be deduced from the *per aliud* solely through the principle of causality. We argued that it could not. In Section III we maintained that the inference was dependent upon the impossibility of an infinite regress, and in Section IV we considered why an infinite regress is impossible and the significance of that prohibition. We concluded that the proofs in fact proceed not simply from the contingency of an individual but from the contingency of the universe itself.

We began this chapter with the question "How does the *per aliud* imply the *per se*?" We have now shown that that proposition, which is the major premise of cosmological demonstrations, is not self-evident and that it is in fact a summary of a more extended argument involving causality and the impossibility of an infinite regress. Our over-all concern is the question "Why is it that

[84] Flint, p. 101. Italics mine.

[85] Clarke, p. 58. Italics mine.

theists find these arguments cogent while non-theists do not?" The purpose of this chapter has been to present the theist's position. In Chapter III we will consider why the non-theist does not grant the premise "If the per aliud, then the per se."

CHAPTER III

The purpose of our investigation of arguments for the existence of God has been to disclose the presuppositions of both the theist and the non-theist in the hope that such a knowledge will enable us better to understand the two points of view and to explain why the former finds the proofs cogent while the latter does not. In Chapter II we presented an analysis of the _per aliud/per se_ implication. We argued that it is not analytic and that consequently, if it was to be maintained, it required additional premises. If this proposition, "the _per aliud_ implies the _per se_," which we have identified as the major premise of the cosmological argument, had been found to be analytic there would be no explanation for the non-theist's skepticism (unless he did not grant the existence of a "_per aliud_," which at the moment seems somewhat unlikely). However, our discussion revealed that the implication is not analytic, and that it depends on (at least) two other premises, namely causality and the impossibility of an infinite regress. It would seem that, if the atheist is to deny this implication, he will have to do it on the basis of a denial of these premises without which there could be no conclusion to an ultimate _per se_.

In Chapter II we suggested that there were three common justifications given in defense of the theist's argument. 1) That an infinite regress is inconceivable; 2) that in a series of dependent causes if there is no first member there will be no subsequent members; and, 3) that even if an infinite series of *per alia* were to be granted, that series itself would require a cause.

Section I: An infinite regress is inconceivable.

In what sense is an infinite regress inconceivable? We understand "infinite" and "regress"; it would seem, then, that we should understand what is meant by "infinite regress." It would appear that by "inconceivable" the theist intends "unimaginable," i.e., that we cannot form a mental image of such a regress. Surely if to comprehend an idea includes the ability to imagine its referent it will follow that an infinite regress will be incomprehensible. But is not creation *ex nihilo* equally inconceivable, equally beyond the human imagination? The non-theist, who would maintain the hypothesis of an infinite regress, cannot but grant the theist's objection that an infinite regress is inconceivable. It is apparent to all that the comprehension of an infinite regress in the sense just suggested is beyond the compass of the human intellect. However, it is equally impossible to comprehend the alternative of a limited series arising *ex nihilo*. It is as impossible to conceive a bounded (finite) universe as it is to conceive an unbounded (infinite) one. The problem here is that if, when confronted with the disjunction between an infinite series of *per alia* and a *per se*, the theist attempts to argue for the *per se* on the basis of a *reductio ad absurdum*[1] (that is to say, on the grounds that the thought of an infinite series is impossible), he will find himself faced with a similar *reductio* by the non-theist to the effect that a finite series is unthinkable. Clearly the disjunction cannot be resolved in this way.

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[1] See Flint, p. 287.

We must note here that the theist's contention that either there must be a first uncaused cause or else the universe will be unintelligible is not sufficient to guarantee the selection of an uncaused cause apart from the presupposition that the universe must be intelligible. This is stated clearly by John Smith, "Invocation of the principle of intelligibility or sufficient reason is the only way of stopping the regress; if the principle is disallowed the argument fails."[2] The theist's claim that the non-theist in proposing an infinite regress is subscribing to an inconceivable solution must undeniably be granted. This is the burden of Montague's observation that the universe which the atheist proposes is "the universe of perpetual miracle."[3] To propose a miracle is to propose something beyond the realm of human reason, something which is impossible in the sense of not fitting into the coherent intellectual framework in which all things are understood to be caused. As such it is a "miracle." But it is no less (and perhaps more) a miracle to suggest that the universe is caused ex nihilo by a being which is completely and utterly unlike the natural beings of experience. "To the human intellect, spontaneous generation is inconceivable, for all understanding is based on the assumption that nihil ex nihilo fit."[4] There is the same intellectual absurdity in the postulation of an uncaused being--whether that being be God or the universe. I am here arguing as Spencer did:

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[2] John Smith, "Religion and Reality: A Dialectic between Philosophy and Religion" (unpublished, Yale University), Chap. 12, p. 50.

[3] William P. Montague, Belief Unbounded (New Haven, 1930), p. 73.

[4] Erich Frank, Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth (London, 1945), p. 55.

> Whoever agrees that the atheistic hypothesis is untenable because it involves the impossible idea of self-existence, must perforce admit that the theistic hypothesis is untenable if it contains the same impossible idea.[5]

The absurdity is a two-way street. From the point of view of the theist, "The disbelief of the atheist must ever seem to all men but himself to require more faith, more credulity, than the beliefs of all the legends of the Talmud."[6] But from the point of view of the atheist the theist's "explanation" is equally incomplete and unsatisfactory: "God made matter. But how, why, and from what? To this theism gives no answer."[7] Each is able to resolve the problem and complete the explanation only through an impossibility. As noted in Chapter II, if we are to arrive at a first uncaused cause, we will have to do it on some grounds other than causality. When the atheist stops the causal chain with an uncaused universe, he ruptures the presuppositions of causality itself. So, too, when the theist posits a first cause which is not caused he is in effect breaking the rules of the game. As Mill observes,

> It is . . . a necessary part of the fact of causation, within the sphere of our experience, that the causes as well as the effects had a beginning in time, and were themselves caused. . . . Our experience, instead of furnishing an argument for a First Cause, is repugnant to it.[8]

[5] Herbert Spencer, as quoted by Flint, p. 299.

[6] Flint, p. 29.

[7] Feuerbach, p. 21.

[8] Mill, Theism, p. 14.

That is to say, the inquiry began and progressed under the assumption that whatever is caused is caused by another, and that every cause is itself an effect. But the inquiry is terminated (artificially) by breaking the rules, overthrowing the "law," and positing an uncaused cause. Schopenhauer's observation that theists treat the law of universal causation as "a hired cab which we dismiss when we have reached our destination"[9] applies no less to the non-theists who posit an uncaused universe. This is not unlike the movement of the Hegelian dialectic which begins by positing the rule that "every thesis has an antithesis," and yet culminates in "a thesis which has no antithesis." Clearly, such "conversation stoppers" are not the product of reasoning, but rather of its abandonment. In this case if either the theist or the atheist is to terminate his investigations such a "leap" must be made. Upon viewing the solution of the theist the atheist finds it to be based on faith and not on reason--and he is right. "How can I look for explanation and information when theology's intelligence fails?"[10] But the same observation could be made about his position. As Clarke said: "/Eternal uncaused duration/ is a thing utterly impossible for our narrow understandings to comprehend."[11] The impossibility is no less manifest when urged by the atheist than it is when urged by the theist. When Flint writes,

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[9] Arthur Schopenhauer, as quoted by Paul Edwards, "The Cosmological Argument" in The Cosmological Arguments, ed. Donald Burrill (Garden City, New York, 1967), p. 110.

[10] Feuerbach, p. 22.

[11] Clarke, p. 19.

> We may not understand how they could be created, but we have no reason for thinking that they could not be created; and it is surely far easier and far more reasonable to believe that they were created,[12]

he is clearly right in his acknowledgement of the impossibility of comprehending how creation takes place, but his evaluation of the difficulty of conceiving creation versus non-creation is simply an expression of the theistic bias.

The common expression of this criticism of theists by atheists is that the finite series they propose is said to terminate in a _per se_, a unique being which is uncaused. However, such a being cannot be thought; it is not conceivable. I do not mean that we do not understand what is here proposed--clearly it is understood, as is an infinite regress. Rather, it is not conceivable in the sense that we do not know "what it would be like." Note that phrase; the problem is that it wouldn't _be like_ anything. We have never experienced a _per se_, anymore than we have an infinity. To propose an infinity or a _per se_ is to propose an explanation which does not explain. If, as Basil Willey suggests,[13] to explain means to level out--to clear away obstacles to the understanding--we cannot but note that the proposal of a _per se_ or of an infinity is a strange sort of "explanation." In a sense it does level the obstacles. The obstacle of causal explanation lies in the fact that the series is never completed and hence there is no final solution. The belief in a _per se_, on the one hand, is simply the contention that there is a final solution which is (and could only be) a cause which is not itself an effect. On the

[12] Flint, p. 109.

[13] Basil Willey, _The Seventeenth Century Background_ (New York, 1934), pp. 12-13.

other hand, the belief in an infinity is the contention that there need be no final solution, merely a series of limited ones. Both alternatives are "conversation stoppers."

Consider the following example. If a young boy were to point to a car and ask, "What makes it go?" and his father were to answer, "An internal-combustion engine," I doubt that an explanation would have been achieved. If one considers, for a moment, the penchant small children have for asking endless questions he will perhaps discover that the reason lies precisely in the fact that we attempt to explain mysteries by still greater mysteries. The problem is that children have not yet learned the social amenity of the "partial explanation." They still possess that natural curiosity of the intelligence which is not content with mysteries; they lack the grace necessary to accept "conversation stoppers." The case of the child and the car is directly parallel to that of our investigation. If there is any doubt of that simply perform the following experiment. When a small child asks, "Where did I come from?" try answering, "From your mother and father." When he then asks (and he will), "Where did they come from?" answer, "From their mother and father." Both you and the child know the next question. If you, then, in an effort to end the conversation and return to the evening paper, say, "And they came from their parents who came from their parents who came from their parents in an endless succession." the child will ask, "How?" To this the only answer is "Go play with your brother!" But the case is no different if you answer that they came from a mother and father who had no mother and father.

The point is that in each alternative there is no real explanation. By a "real explanation" I understand a response to those obstacles which originally initiated the question, which is in itself intelligible and does not raise still greater obstacles. When the atheist says that all reality is composed of per alia the theist senses the inadequacy of his answer and asks, "But where did the first one come from--or where did they all come from?" This is most evident in teaching students at the University of Notre Dame; when presented with the infinite regress of an uncaused universe they say that that alternative is intellectually derelict--that it fails to raise necessary questions. In this they are undoubtedly right. But the atheist, when presented with the theist's alternative of a finite caused universe, senses the same intellectual dissatisfaction, the same incompleteness.

Perhaps the only satisfactory answer is for both to recognize the inadequacy of their "explanations" and then to admit that, knowing that it is not complete, the mind still requires that the system be closed somewhere--and I have chosen to close it here. Both the theist and the atheist are proposing miraculous solutions; neither can be rationally sustained. It would seem that one must "Pay his money and make his choice." (Although the theist is often heard to insist at this point that we will choose now and pay later.)

What, however, of this alternative that I am proposing, i.e., that neither theism nor atheism can claim the sanction of reason, that both are intellectually impossible? Consider what Clarke had to say about this suggestion in 1705:

> Indeed, were it possible there should be any proposition which could equally be demonstrated on both sides of the question, or which could on both sides be reduced to imply a contradiction; this, it must be confessed, would alter the case. . . .[14]

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[14] Clarke, p. 21.

Clarke did not think, of course, that any such demonstration would be forthcoming; he was wrong. In 1781 precisely that was demonstrated by Immanuel Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason. Consider the first antinomy disclosed by Kant: "The World has, as to Time and Space, a Beginning," versus, "The World is, as to Time and Space, infinite."[15] Kant provides the following arguments[16] to demonstrate that both these contrary hypotheses are acceptable.

That the world has a beginning in time:

1. Assume that the world did not begin.
2. Then it is eternal and an infinite series of successive states has preceded our own state.
3. But an infinite series is one that cannot be transversed in successive states.
4. It is therefore impossible that an infinite series of states has preceded this one.
5. The world must have had a beginning.

This proof that the world is temporally finite is then juxtaposed to the following argument to the effect that the world is eternal.

That the world is eternal:

1. Assume the world had a beginning.
2. A thing has a beginning when it is preceded by a time in which it was not.
3. For the world to have begun there must have been a time in which the world was not.
4. "No coming to be is possible in empty time."
5. Therefore the world could not have begun.
6. The world is then eternal.

Clarke was right when he noted that the viability of his demonstration would be "altered" if it were to be demonstrated that contrary propositions could be logically deduced. However, what is altered is not necessarily its acceptability, only the possibility of

[15] Kant, Prolegomena, pp. 105-106.

[16] Kant, Pure Reason, pp. 396-397.

demonstrating its logical certainty. Indeed, one is still free to believe that the world began in time, but the belief (like the belief that the world is eternal) is no longer to be regarded as intellectually justifiable. Its justification must come from another source; for Kant that source is the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

To summarize, neither the theist nor the atheist has proposed an acceptable solution to the problem of causality. Both alternatives, creation *ex nihilo* and a *regressus ad infinitum*, are intellectually untenable. Since both may be reduced to absurdity there can be no decisive argument in these epistemological terms. Hence we will have to turn to the other objections.

Section II: There must be a first term.

The former objection complained of an intellectual impossibility, i.e., that the proposal of an infinite regress was not responsive to the demands of reason. We must now consider the objection that the proposal of an infinite regress is not responsive to the demands of beings. The objection we have just discussed argued that an infinite regress was not compatible with the nature of the human intellect. The objections we are about to consider argue that the hypothesis of an infinite regress is not compatible with the nature of the beings it is intended to explain. We have cited two such arguments against the possibility of an infinite regress; one maintains that a series of contingent causes must have a first term which is an uncaused cause, and the other argues that even if there is no first the series as a whole requires a cause. I would suggest that both these contentions are simply wrong. We will begin by considering the first.

The argument that a causal series must have a first cause is in fact directed toward the contention of a finite series and not an infinite one. If the series is to come to an end (i.e., be finite) it must have a first cause, but the series here proposed is by definition one which does not come to an end. It is a series, to use Duns Scotus' definition, in which "each thing in reference to what precedes it in the series will be second."[17] It is a series in which there is no first. It is true that every contingent member must be preceded by another being, but under the supposition of an infinite regress every member will be preceded by another. Furthermore, it is true that if the series is to come to an end (be finite) it must terminate in a first cause which is per se, not itself caused, but the non-theist's contention is that this is a series which does not come to an end--and hence that the hypothesis of an uncaused cause is superfluous.

Aristotle objected to the infinite causal series A, B, C, . . . etc. on the grounds that if A does not exist (an infinite series has no first term), then B, C, . . . etc. will not exist. No doubt he is right. However, as Professor Paul Edwards has insightfully noted, the fallacy of Aristotle's objection lies in the fact that he wrongly assesses the defender of an infinite regress as one who "takes away the first member,"[18] i.e., one who does away with A. In this he "fails to do justice to the supporter of the infinite series of causes."[19] To maintain an infinite series is not to deny the existence of A, but rather to deny that A is first.

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[17] Duns Scotus, p. 43.

[18] Edwards, p. 105. See also Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1032b30.

[19] Ibid.

We have noted above Paley's argument that an infinite chain is no more capable of supporting itself than is a finite one. But here again there is a misconception of the infinite series proposed. "The advocates of the causal argument . . . seem to confuse an infinite series with one which is long but finite."[20] It is Paley's contention that, if link A is not to collapse, it must be suspended from B, which in turn must hang from C, etc. Now, it is clearly true that A will be no better supported by a chain of 10,000 links than by a chain of 100. But here we are still speaking of finite chains.

> A *finite* series . . . would indeed come crashing down, since the first [or highest member] . . . would not have a predecessor on which it could be supported. If the series, however, were infinite this would not be the case.[21]

The point is this. If the series is to end, the theist is correct in maintaining that it cannot end with a contingent member. However, the proposal here is that the series is not to end, that it is infinite. If the series is to be explained, there are two alternatives: either it must rest on a first uncaused (*per se*) being, which being uncaused is totally unique, or it must proceed to infinity. We are not proposing the absurdity of a very long chain which finally ends in a void; we are proposing a series which does not end at all. It would seem that the claim that the series must have a first member which is *per se* is not well founded, and that this objection to an infinite series of contingent beings stems from the failure to treat the proposed series as infinite rather than merely "very long."

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

We can refute this criticism from still another perspective. Why must a series have a first member? There would seem to be two possible reasons. Either the non-theist's claim is logically impossible (a priori) or it is factually erroneous (a posteriori). Clearly there can be no a posteriori arguments in the issue of the finitude or infinitude of the universe.[22] Therefore, if an impossibility is still to be maintained it must be demonstrated a priori--an infinite series must be a logical impossibility. But infinite series exist; the series of natural numbers, for instance, is an infinite series. And if, as Aquinas said, actuality proves possibility, then an infinite series must be possible, and hence it is not impossible.

Of course, there may be some question as to whether the case of numbers is really analogous to that of contingent beings. Might it not be the nature of the members of a series which determines whether or not it might be infinite? We will consider the nature of per alia more fully below,[23] but it is apparent even now that a per aliud must have its existence, or the existence of one of its qualities, from another. Now if each individual is dependent on a prior individual it would seem that, far from the nature of the members of this series arguing against an infinite regress, such a regress is in fact required. A series composed solely of contingent beings, each preceded by another, cannot have a first member, because such a first would not be a contingent being and hence would not be a part of the series.

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[22] Kant, Prolegomena, p. 109.

[23] See below, Chapters 4 and 5.

Let this stand as our defense of the possibility of an infinite regress, a defense argued both on the grounds of logical possibility and the nature of the members. This alone is not sufficient to void the cosmological argument. It would be sufficient only if, as we argued in Chapter II, the impossibility of an infinite regress is a necessary condition for the conclusion to God. There are, however, challenges to this analysis. It is fashionable among contemporary proponents to argue that the proofs for the existence of God do not depend on the impossibility of an infinite regress.

Maritain, for example, expresses this contention through the distinction between "horizontal" and "vertical" causality. Horizontal causality is defined as merely a "successive infinite series of causes and events succeeding one another in time."[24] This "'horizontal' series of homogeneous causes or causes on the same level, each of which merely accounts for the positing of the following one in existence,"[25] he correctly grants, is not impossible. But, though such a "horizontal" series is indeed possible, it is not possible in itself. Maritain contends that when the theist says that an infinite regress in causes is not possible he is not speaking of this horizontal series, but of a "vertical" series--a series of "heterogeneous causes or causes on different levels."[26] It is the regress of these causes which are different in kind which may not be infinite; it is this series of causes that is possible only if "it is appendent to the

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[24] Maritain, Approaches, p. 42.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 43. See also Gilson, St. Thomas, p. 65.

'intelligibility-through itself' of a First Cause, which exists in its own right."[27] In other words, the series as a whole must have a cause different from the causality which links the finite members of that series. The series may be infinite, but it may not be uncaused.

The same sort of disclaimer is voiced by St. Thomas in his well-known remark that we cannot rationally prove that there must have been a first member in the series; that the series is not eternal (infinite) he acknowledges is a tenet of belief and not of reason. In answer to the question "Utrum mundum incoepisse sit articulua fidei," he writes:

> Respondeo dicendum quod mundum non semper fuisse, sola fide tenetur, et demonstrative probari non potest. . . . Et huius ratio est, quia novitas mundi non potest demonstrationem recipere ex parte ipsius mundi. . . . Unde mundum incoepisse est credible, non autem demonstrabile vel scibile.[28]

There must be no misunderstanding about the intent of this passage. Aquinas is conceding that the world may not have begun in time, that it may not have a "first," and hence that it may be eternal (in the sense of perpetual); he is not conceding that the world was not created. St. Thomas understands "creation" as a relation of dependency; the world is an effect and God is its cause. What Aquinas is granting is that we do not know that this act whereby God bestows the act of being on creatures began in time. We do know, he believes, that God bestows being and that without Him nothing could exist. That the world was created in time and is not eternal is a belief of faith; however, that it was created may be rationally demonstrated. How? As Gilson says,[29] that is what the cosmological argument is all about; it is a proof of creation.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] S.T., I, q.46, a.2. See also, Walter Kaufman, Critique of Religion and Philosophy (Garden City, New York, 1961), p. 152.

What about these insights of St. Thomas and Maritain to the effect that cosmological arguments may conclude to God even on the supposition of an infinite regress of *per alia*? They are, perhaps, acceptable expressions of the theist's position; however, they merely serve to emphasize the conclusion that we argued to in Chapter II, namely that the theist is one who presupposes that the universe of natural causes must itself be caused by *some other kind* of cause--an assertion that the atheist neither understands nor accepts.[30] The premise asserting the impossibility of an infinite regress functions to resolve the disjunction between an infinite series of *per alia* and a *per se*. On the grounds of this premise it was argued that an infinite series of contingent beings required a non-contingent cause, that it must be united to a First Cause. In other words, the proposition to be proved is that a different kind of cause, an uncaused cause, is necessary (or in Maritain's terminology that there are different levels of causality). In Maritain's discussion of vertical (heterogeneous) causality the impossibility of an infinite regress may be done away with precisely because he is willing to do away with a proof that a different kind of causality is necessary. He simply asserts that "these are heterogeneous causes

[29] Gilson, *Spirit*, p. 74.

[30] I do not mean to suggest by "presuppose" that the theist simply assumes, without argumentation, that the universe as a whole requires a cause (As we saw in Chapter II [pp. 49-51] the prohibition of an infinite regress of caused causes is in fact an argument for a caused universe.), but rather that it is a necessary premise if the cosmological argument is to conclude to God.

or causes on different levels." In so doing he presupposes that a series of contingent beings is possible only if "it is appendent to the 'intelligibility-through-itself' of a First Cause, which exists in its own right."

In conclusion, the preclusion of an infinite regress is necessary to prove that the totality of contingent beings must itself be an effect, i.e., that the universe as a whole must have a cause. As we discovered in Chapter II, it is the belief that the universe as a whole is per aliud that ultimately allows the conclusion to God. It is argued that even if the series of per alia is infinite it nevertheless requires a cause. We turn now to this contention.

Section III: That the universe as a whole requires a cause.

I believe that arguments put forth in support of the contention that the universe as a whole requires a cause are also erroneous. We noted this argument in the debate between Russell and Copleston. The latter maintained that "an infinite series of contingent beings will be . . . as unable to cause itself as one contingent being";[31] to which Russell replied, "I see no reason to suppose that the total has any cause whatsoever."[32] Russell then rejected Copleston's argument on the grounds that it committed the fallacy of composition. Copleston, says Russell, has argued from a characteristic of the parts (namely that they are caused) to a characteristic of the whole. Russell likens this to arguing "Every man who exists has a mother . . . therefore the human race has a mother."[33] The contention voiced by

[31] Russell and Copleston, p. 174.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[33] *Ibid.*

Copleston and other theists to the effect that the natural series of contingent beings cannot be its own cause rests on the assumption that "not only every particular thing in the world, but the world as a whole must have a cause."[34] Russell's point is that "the concept of cause is not applicable to the total."[35]

There are two elements in Russell's refutation which should be elaborated; one is the notion of "totality" and the other is that of "causality." We may well discuss the first by recalling Hume's Dialogues. After Demea has observed that:

> [Given an infinite chain of causes] the whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by anything: And yet it is evident that it requires a cause or reason as much as any particular object. . . .[36]

Cleanthes offers the following rebuttal:

> But the WHOLE, you say, wants a cause. I answer, that the uniting of these parts into a whole . . . is performed merely by an arbitrary act of the mind, and has no influence on the nature of things.[37]

A group is nothing more than the totality of its membership. If we have developed an explanatory system in which each member is explained by the one preceding it, and each member is preceded by another, then there is no sense in asking for an explanation of the whole as if it were something above and beyond the members which make it up.[38] If the members are explained, the whole is explained. Demea is mistakenly treating the "whole" as if it were a real thing, whereupon he then attempts to apply the same categories to this "thing" as are applied to others. Demea's (and other theists') request for an explanation of the whole rests on the presupposition that the whole is a reality apart from its membership--otherwise why would they seek its cause? I for one find that presupposition untenable. But whether it is an acceptable assumption or not, the fact is clear that it is not a necessary one. I would submit that we have confronted here one of the many presuppositions of the cosmological proofs for the existence of God which may or may not be shared. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of those proofs. If the acceptability of discussion about "the whole" is granted, the proofs may follow; if it is not, they cannot follow.

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[34] Ibid., p. 176.

[35] Ibid., p. 175.

[36] Hume, Dialogues, p. 188.

[37] Ibid., p. 190.

[38] Cf. Russell and Copleston, p. 174. Russell: "I think the word 'universe' is a handy word in some connections, but I don't think it stands for anything that has a meaning."

Consider now the notion of causality. Even if the theist's opponent is willing to accept discourse about "the whole" he will not be willing to grant the application of causal terms to this totality. Matson expresses this objection quite clearly:

> The universe is a framework within which causal explanations operate. And although these explanations show the linkage of one part of the universe to another, it is quite beyond their scope to link the universe to anything else.[39]

This objection, and ones like it, stem from the Kantian critique which maintained that the principle of causality could only be employed to relate phenomena. As Kant saw it the problem with cosmological proofs was that "the cosmological idea extends the connection of the conditioned with its condition . . . so far, that experience can never keep up with it."[40] However, right or wrong, the human mind has a tendency to employ this causal implication. A major difference between the theist and the atheist seems to lie in the fact that the theist understands the universe as an effect while the atheist does not. Because the non-theist is not presented with a contingent universe, he feels no need to infer a cause. The problem comes down, as we suggested in Chapter II, to whether or not the universe is an effect.

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[39] Matson, p. 83.

When Flint suggested that for the proper appreciation of the cosmological proofs one must have "some immediate and direct experience of causation,"[41] he put his finger on a central problem in the debate about these arguments for the existence of God. The theist and atheist have different notions about this causal principle. The former is willing, indeed compelled, to extend the relation between cause and effect beyond individual beings to the sum of those beings, i.e., the universe itself. The latter believes that "the concept of cause is one we derive from our observation of particular things"; he sees "no reason whatsoever to suppose that the total has any cause."[42]

Consider the following passage in which Maritain discloses what "a philosopher ought to know" if he is to grasp "the demonstrative value of proofs for the existence of God." Among the presuppositions listed is this one:

> He ought to know that the principle of causality . . . is neither the expression of a simple mental habit [Hume] . . .

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[40] Kant, Prolegomena, p. 105.

[41] Flint, p. 64.

[42] Russell and Copleston, p. 175.

> nor, as Kant would have it, a "synthetic a priori judgment" whose necessity follows upon the structure of our mind and whose range is limited to the world of experience. The principle of causality is a principle "known in itself," known by an immediate intellectual intuition that imposes itself upon the mind . . . and reaches beyond the world of experience.[43]

Now the plain fact is that there are a great many men who know no such thing, men who conceive causality to be a mental category rather than a real relation among things and who believe that causality must be limited to phenomenal experience. Once again, there is no suggestion that Maritain's presuppositions are invalid--only that they are not necessarily shared. And it is in the absence of those presuppositions that the proofs fail.

A further problem experienced by the non-theist in viewing these demonstrations becomes evident at this point. If it is legitimate to extend the principle of causality beyond particular individual things, why must it then stop at God? The non-theist has difficulty in forgetting the lesson that John Stuart Mill learned from his illustrious father and recorded in his Autobiography:

> He impressed upon me from the first, that the manner in which the world came into existence was a subject upon which nothing was known: that the question, "Who made me?" cannot be answered, because we have no experience or authentic information from which to answer it; and that any answer only throws the difficulty a step further back, since the question immediately presents itself, "Who made God?"[44]

In commenting on this passage in his famous essay "Why I am Not a Christian" Bertrand Russell writes: "If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God."[45] Of course, it is not the theist's contention that everything must have a cause; under that maxim the idea of an uncaused cause would clearly be impossible. The theist does not claim that _all_ beings must have a cause, only that _contingent_ beings (those beings which reveal themselves to be _per aliud_) must be caused. The theist's answer to Mill's question is, therefore, "Nothing made God--God is uncaused," or in St. Thomas' terms it is God's essence to exist. But that is precisely how the non-theist feels about the universe of _per alia_; it is its nature to exist. "Why may not the material universe be the necessarily existent Being?"[46] As Spencer noted, both positions end in the notion of a _per se_. It would seem to some, however, that the theist has a better case for arguing that God is _per se_ than the non-theist for arguing that the universe is _per se_. The non-theist must after all deal with a universe composed of contingent _per alia_. But, as we have maintained above, it is not permissible to argue from the character of parts to that of the whole. Therefore any advantage which the theist may seem to have in maintaining that God is _per se_ and that the universe could not be is merely apparent.

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[43] Maritain, Approaches, pp. 32-33. Italics mine.

[44] John Stuart Mill, Autobiography (New York, 1909), p. 33.

Summary:

We have attempted in this chapter to discover the presuppositions upon which the cosmological argument rests and to suggest that these assumptions are not necessarily shared by the theist and non-theist. Because these presuppositions are not accepted by the

[45] Bertrand Russell, _Why I am Not a Christian_ (New York, 1957), pp. 6-7.

[46] Hume, _Dialogues_, p. 190.

non-theist he finds the proofs unacceptable. The theist, on the contrary, accepts them and with their aid may conclude to the existence of God.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, it has not been my intention to refute the theist's belief that the universe is an effect and that it rests on a cause which is not itself an effect. Nor have I intended to argue that the atheist's presuppositions are necessarily correct. My purpose was simply to reveal the presuppositions of each and thereby to explain the debate.

The theist and atheist are often in the position of giving bad reasons for perfectly acceptable beliefs. In attempting to justify the belief that the world was created theists argue that an infinite regress of caused causes is impossible while atheists contend that it is not. Each attempts to reduce to absurdity the contentions of the other, and each may do so successfully. But when confronted with the issue whether the world is an effect or not, there is little to be gained by reductions to absurdity; for if one side employs them, the other may also. And if one attempts a positive proof, so may the other. Here the only alternative is to grant: I must believe something; I will believe this; "Here I stand." We find ourselves at the level of ultimate presuppositions; those of the theist and the atheist are equally acceptable and unacceptable. We are dealing with the premises of rival interpretative systems--each within its own sphere is tenable; neither is able to falsify the other. For example, it does little good for the theist to object that the universe as a whole requires a cause when the non-theist does not consider the whole to be a reality, and consequently does not believe it requires a cause. The issue is between distinct interpretations of a reality; the theist and non-theist see reality differently; it poses different questions to each. In short, the rival systems arise in response to divergent views of what has to be explained.

Our conclusion is, then, that both the theist and the atheist may ultimately be pushed back to certain absolute presuppositions. The theist presupposes, for no good reason, that the universe is an effect; the non-theist presupposes, for no good reason, that it is not. Why one man believes the former and the other the latter is perhaps best answered by psychologists or sociologists.

We have asked why intelligent men disagree about the acceptability of cosmological proofs for the existence of God. In this chapter and the one preceding it we focused our attention on the major premise of those arguments, "the *per aliud* implies the *per se*." We have attempted to disclose the presuppositions necessary for this implication and to demonstrate that they may be denied by the atheist with as much intellectual integrity as leads the theist to affirm them. We will now turn our attention to the minor premise, "there exists a *per aliud*."

CHAPTER IV

Having devoted chapters two and three to a consideration of the major premise of the cosmological proofs for the existence of God, we will now turn, in chapters four and five, to a discussion of the minor premise. We will first ask what is meant by the theist's assertion "There exists a per aliud," having determined that we will then discuss the atheist's response to this contention.

Unlike chapter two which dealt with the per aliud/per se inference, and was consequently rather long, our present discussion should be accomplished rather briefly. Here there is no argument to discover, only a contention to be explained.[1] It should be apparent at the outset, however, that this chapter, though perhaps not as involved as the previous ones, is every bit as crucial. It is this assertion of a per aliud which is the foundation of the inference of a per se. Our previous discussion has been hypothetical; if the per aliud, then the per se. We sought only the grounds for the inference, We must now address the theist's claim that this inference is not just hypothetical, i.e., that there exists a per aliud and consequently that there exists a per se. No treatment of the cosmological argument can hope to be complete without thorough consideration of the theist's understanding of "per aliud." To accomplish this I propose the following: 1. Analyze the arguments of St. Thomas in an effort to

[1] Certainly there are arguments in support of this premise. I mean only to suggest that the premise itself is not an inference, i.e., not "If . . . then. . . ."

identify precisely what it is which is considered per aliud, i.e., to ascertain what it is that a being has through another. 2. Discuss the metaphysics presupposed by such an assertion, especially the notion of substance, and consider some of the ramifications inherent in it.

Section I: There exists a per aliud.

In chapter one[2] we summarized the first premise of St. Thomas' proofs for the existence of God (the five ways and the De Ente argument) in the following way:

1. There exist:
    - A. Things in motion.
    - B. An order of efficient causes.
    - C. Things for which it is possible to be and not to be.
    - D. Beings more or less good, true, etc.
    - E. Unintelligent beings which act purposefully.
    - F. Beings whose existence is distinct from their essence.

We suggested then that these premises have a dual function in the proofs. First, they make an existential claim; second, they identify one or more properties (of existing things) which need explanation, cannot be explained by these things themselves, and hence require an explanation by another. Thus in the argument from motion there are two distinct propositions: "some things are in motion" and "whatever is moved is moved by another." The judgment is two-fold, first that something exists, and second that it is in some way dependent upon another. We concluded by suggesting that these various claims of dependency could be summarized in the more general formulation (which is applicable to all cosmological arguments), "There exists a per aliud."

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[2] See above, p. 16.

The existential judgment is extremely important in cosmological arguments because it posits the existence of the per aliud without which it would be impossible to conclude to the existence of the per se. You get out of an argument only what you put into it; if existence is not somehow incorporated in the premises of the proof it cannot be extracted in the conclusion. In spite of the importance of this existential claim I suggest we postpone our consideration of it until chapter five. It is sufficient, for the present, to note that its verification is a posteriori; St. Thomas begins, "It is certain and evident to our senses," or "In the world of sensible things we find. . . ." etc. The real difficulty in understanding the theist's claim that there exists a per aliud is in coming to an understanding of exactly what he means by "per aliud."

We have already given a general indication of the meaning of per aliud in previous chapters. A being which is per aliud is one which is "through another." It has motion, or becoming, or goodness, etc. only through (or with dependence on) another. A per aliud is an effect which requires an external cause. "Speaking generally the contingent is what depends on a condition other than itself."[3] Per alia are characterized by a "precariousness," an "iffyness."[4] Hartshorne suggests the following as characteristics of contingent beings (per alia):

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[3] H. J. Paton, The Modern Predicament (New York, 1962), p. 198.

[4] See Hartshorne, p. 61. This is not to say, however, that all per alia are contingent. It is also possible to have necessity from another. See the second part of the third way which employs the notion of caused-necessary.

1. Its existence precludes the existence of something else.
2. Depends causally for its existence on some other being.
3. Could be conceived both to exist and not to exist.
4. Dependent upon others for its qualities.
5. Is itself a cause of other things.
6. Its actuality includes (as parts) the actuality of other things.
7. Quantitatively and qualitatively limited.
8. Has a beginning (or can be conceived to have a beginning).
9. Can be defined or identified only empirically.
10. Is good for limited purposes.[5]

It is clear from the above indications that a being may be contingent in many ways; its motion may be through another, its purpose, even its location. But just because a being is conditioned it does not necessarily follow that its condition must be God. For instance, a billard ball may not be the cause of its own motion, but the cue stick and I may be. Similarly, this desk is not the cause of its being here rather than over there, but it hardly seems necessary to suggest that God is. Granted that beings are per aliud, or contingent, in what sense are they so? Wherein lies their inadequacy? What we, and all those who truly want to understand the arguments of theists, must seek to understand is precisely in what sense a being is per aliud, so that only God can be its condition.

In the case of St. Thomas it is not immediately clear (to those of us on the outside looking in) precisely what he wishes to identify as per aliud. In his first proof he argues that motion is through another, maintaining that "whatever is moved is moved by another." (That this must be so is argued from the definition of motion. In the second way it is efficient causality which is per aliud; in the third way it is possibility; in the fourth it is goodness; and in the fifth it is activity for an end. I am concerned here to discern whether it is the qualities and characteristics of a being or the being itself that is per aliud. At first glance it would appear that St. Thomas is focusing on certain qualities of individuals which are conditioned by others. Clearly motion is only a characteristic of a being; it is not that the being itself is per aliud--only its movement. To say that a rock's movement through the air is due to another is not to say that the rock is due to another. In the second proof he argues that no thing can be its own efficient cause, but it is not clear precisely what a thing cannot cause in itself; it could be, as in the first way, that no thing can be the efficient cause of its own motion (or of some other quality). The third way argues that no possible thing can be the source of its own actuality, but it is not clear exactly what possibility (possibility of what) is being identified; is it the possibility of the being, or of one of its qualities? In the fourth way there is no question that it is a quality which is understood to be per aliud; the goodness of a being is relative to (or dependent upon) an absolute standard. (It is subsequently argued that the goodness and being of a thing are convertible.) And finally in the fifth way it is the quality of purposiveness which is contingent; merely the direction of the being is ab extra, not the being itself.

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[5] Ibid., pp. 74-75.

Be that as it may, I believe that there can be no proper appreciation of the profoundness of the per aliud to which the theist points until we understand that it is being itself, not the characteristics or qualities of being, which the theist understands to be per aliud. Many non-theists have failed to appreciate the cogency of these demonstrations only because they have not understood that the theist is claiming not that the per aliud movement of beings requires God, but that their per aliud being requires God, the per se being.

In arguing quia, from effect to cause, it is necessary that the theist select only that contingency which will lead to that unique cause which is God. For instance, from motion we may conclude to a prime mover (as did Aristotle); however, few (if any) theists would rest content with such a limited notion of God. They would like to believe that God is more; that he is not merely the cause of motion, but of moving things. What is needed is the conclusion to a God which is the cause of being. We noted in our introduction[6] that there is a certain sense in which one must presuppose an idea of God prior to proving God's existence. If we are going to construct an argument from effects to their cause we must be able to select those effects which are truly evidences of the cause sought. For example, one may argue from this desk (effect) to a carpenter (cause); however, to do so successfully one must select only those qualities of the desk which give evidence of that particular cause; we could not, for instance, select the haphazard arrangement of books and papers as evidence of a carpenter. So it is in arguing toward God, if we are to demonstrate his causality from his effects we must first know which effects are evidence of that causality--and to know that we must have some basic notion of God. Thus in seeking to identify the per aliud incorporated in the theist's arguments for the existence of God we must know something of the causality which God is understood to exercise.

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[6] See above, p. 21.

What then is the effect brought about by divine causality? In considering the question "whether it Belongs to God Alone to Create?" St. Thomas writes the following:

> Respondeo dicendum quod . . . creare non potest esse propria actio nisi solius Dei. Oportet enim universaliores effectus in universaliores et priores causas reducere. Inter omnes autem effectus, universalissimum est ipsum esse. Unde oportet quod sit proprius effectus primae et universalissimae causae, quae est Deus.[7]

God is the cause of being. The effect which is proper to his causation, and by which alone that causation may be inferred, is being. To argue to the cause of being one must proceed from caused being, i.e., from that which has being *per aliud*. The theist, in his argument *quia*, must proceed from creatures which are said to have not just their motion, or some other quality, through another, but their very being. What is metaphysically interesting in the proofs of St. Thomas is not that things are caused to move, but that they are caused *to be*.

In reading the cosmological arguments of St. Thomas for the existence of God it is necessary, then, that we understand that the contingency which he asserts is a contingency in the order of being itself, not just the qualities of beings; beings themselves are *per aliud*. This more profound contingency is readily apparent in the *De Ente* proof where it is argued that no creature can be the cause of its own existence. This is the core of the theist's understanding of contingency; creatures are not simply "through another" in motion, or in acting for an end, etc., but in being itself.[8] The very being of a thing is conditioned and dependent upon another. Hence, the point is _not_ that apart from another being, it could not _move_; but that it could not _be_.

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[7] S.T., I, q.45, a.5.

[8] See *De Ente*, Chap. 4, para. 26.

One cannot help but wonder why, if this interpretation is correct, Aquinas did not repeat the explicit statement of contingency in the order of being found in _De Ente_ in the later formulations of the _Summa Theologiae_. Perhaps it is because the latter formulations are presented as reformulations of traditional proofs not originally his own. Perhaps the limited contingency of the five ways is simply an invitation to recall the more profound contingency of _De Ente_. Perhaps an explicit statement of the contingent being of things is necessary only for those of us who do not intuitively share St. Thomas' notion of being (who do not realize, for example, that the actuality considered in the third way is that of existence). Why this contingency is not made more apparent I do not know, but there is no doubt that it is a contingency of being, and not of the qualities of being that is here proposed and which serves as the foundation for the argument to a _per se_. To demonstrate this we must again take up the Thomistic texts.

Note the use to which St. Thomas puts the conclusions of Aristotle in this summary of the first way:

> Ostensum est in primo libro, per rationem eiusdem [_Aristotle_], esse aliquod primum movens immobile, quod Deum dicimus. Primum autem movens in quolibet ordine motuum est causa omnium motuum qui sunt illius ordinis. Cum igitur multa ex motibus caeli producantur in esse, in quorum ordine Deum esse primum movens ostensum est, oportet quod Deus sit multis rebus causa essendi.[9]

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[9] C.G., II, 6.

Notice that he begins with "cause of movements" (Aristotle) and concludes with "cause of being." The ambiguity in the thing caused (the effect) is manifest. In what sense is the first mover the cause of all subsequent movements? Is it the cause of motion, or of the things moved? That depends on whether you are Aristotle or Aquinas. For the former it is the cause of motion,[10] for the latter it is the cause of being. The point is this, by Aquinas' own summary of the argument, it is not movement which is contingent, but being. Gilson is quite explicit in admitting that for the Christian the contingency of movement is only an invitation to the awareness of the contingency of being itself.

> Henceforth [given the Christian understanding of being] movement is seen to involve something more than the contingency of modes of being, something more even than the contingency of the substantiality of beings that arise and vanish according to their changing participations in the intelligibility of the form or idea: it means now the radical contingency of the very existence of beings subject to becoming.[11]

This "radical contingency" is far more profound than simply the contingency of the qualities of a thing; it penetrates to its very being. It is clear, then, that when Aquinas points to the movement of a thing and identifies it as conditioned the significance of that contingency extends beyond the movement to the thing itself.

St. Thomas also recalls the second proof as one which moves from that which is per aliud in the order of being to that which is not:

> Ostensum est enim supra, per demonstrationem Aristotelis, esse aliquam primam causam efficientem, quam Deum dicimus. Efficiens autem causa suos effectus ad esse conducit. Deus igitur aliis essendi causa existit.[12]

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[10] See Physics, 243a4.

[11] Gilson, Spirit, pp. 67-68.

[12] C.G., II, 6.

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Here it is St. Thomas' goal to demonstrate that God is the cause of being; this is not, however, the proper conclusion of Aristotle's demonstration. Therefore it must be "interpreted." To accomplish this Aquinas re-defines "efficient cause" as the cause of being, "an efficient cause brings its effects into being." This is all well and good, but it does not seem to be what Aristotle understood by efficient causality. Aristotle's causes are causes of becoming rather than of being; they are causes of change,[13] "of both coming to be and passing away."[14] Aristotle defines an efficient cause as "the primary source of the change or coming to rest."[15] Later, in the Metaphysics, an efficient cause is again defined as "That from which the change or resting from change first begins."[16] Clearly, there is a vast difference between a cause of change and a cause of being. It is Aristotle's conclusion that the changes and alterations of beings are per aliud and hence require an efficient cause; it is St. Thomas' contention that the being of things is per aliud and that an efficient cause of being is necessary.

If one understands "per aliud" to refer simply to that which has the quality of motion, or activity for an end, or form, etc., from another, then one may discover an adequate explanation for that contingency in the pages of Aristotle's Metaphysics. There beings possess motion, or activity for an end, or form, and communicate it to others. But although they receive characteristics from another, even form itself, they are not made to be by another--only to be this. Consequently they do not owe their being to another, but rather their being this. Such is not, however, the case in the metaphysics of St. Thomas; there it is not the form of being, but being itself that is contingent. That is to say, a being is not per aliud merely insomuch as it is of this kind, but insomuch as it has esse, insomuch as it exercises the act of existing. To understand the force of the cosmological demonstrations for the existence of God one must understand the radical precariousness of existence in the Christian world. There, to be per aliud is not just to be moved by another (after all that is possible in the system of Aristotle); it is to have being itself through another. This is not to be understood as having "becoming" through another, as in Aristotle's metaphysics, but being itself through another. Without this other it could not be. I do not say, "It could not be of this kind," but, "It could not be." Every moment of its existence is through another. Existence is per accidens to its essence.

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[13] David Ross, Aristotle (New York, 1923), p. 72.

[14] Aristotle, Physics, 194b22.

[15] Ibid., b29.

[16] Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1013a30.

Let these indications suffice for our conclusion that it is a contingency in the order of being, rather than in the kinds of being, which is identified in the minor premise of these cosmological arguments. Not only the first and second proof of the Summa Theologiae, but the third, fourth, and fifth as well, should be read in this context. It is absolutely essential to the success of the theist's argument that the very being of things be per aliud; how could he conclude to a cause of being if not from that effect which is contingent being itself?

We have argued in Section I that the Thomistic proofs proceed from a per aliud in the order of being. It has been our contention that the contingent beings to which Aquinas points require a cause for their very being, not just for some aspects of that being. We must now consider the metaphysics which underlie these proofs. What is meant by saying that existence is distinct from essence? What are the grounds for this dichotomy? What does St. Thomas understand by "substance"?

Section II: Thomistic Metaphysics.

I intend, in this section, to make clear the notion of existential contingency in the philosophy of St. Thomas. To do so I will employ an interpretation of St. Thomas and of Aristotle which is generally attributed to Etienne Gilson. It is an interpretation in which it is argued that St. Thomas was doing in his metaphysics something quite different than was Aristotle in his. I am not prepared to defend Gilson's position (such historical considerations are beyond the limits of this study); I offer it only as an hypothesis.

The thesis that beings are existentially per aliud is the consequence of a complicated and subtle metaphysics to which we cannot hope to do justice in these few pages. It is, however, important that we have some understanding, albeit a limited one, of the metaphysics which is presupposed in the cosmological demonstrations of St. Thomas. But to appreciate the metaphysics of Aquinas it is first necessary, for purposes of comparison, to indicate something of Aristotle's.

The Aristotelian discussion of being is founded on the proposition that "While 'being' has all these senses, obviously that which 'is' primarily is the 'what,' which indicates the substance of the thing."[17] Which is to say, to be is to be a substance.[18] Note, the primary sense of being is substance. From which it follows,

> Clearly then it is in virtue of this category that each of the others also is. Therefore that which is primarily, i.e., not in a qualified sense but without qualification, must be substance.[19]

For Aristotle the question "what being is, is just the question, what is substance?"[20] To what does Aristotle apply the name "substance"?

> We call substance . . . the simple bodies, i.e., earth and fire and water and everything of the sort, and in general bodies and things composed of them. . . . All these are called substance because they are not predicated of a subject but everything else is predicated of them.[21]

Aristotle is very much at home in speaking of "sensible substances"; he identifies the primary instance of substance to be sensible individuals. "Substance, in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse."[22]

In the metaphysics of Aristotle sensible individuals are substances or (as Owens would prefer)[23] entities in their own right. To be is primarily to be a substance, and these particular beings are the primary instance of substance. The whole quest of Aristotle's metaphysics is then devoted to an inquiry into substance and the question "what is that which is in this sense."[24] To this question "What does it mean to be a substance?" he responds, "While 'being' has all these senses, obviously that which 'is' primarily is the 'what,' that which indicates the substance of the thing."[25] "The essence of each thing is what it is said to be propter se."[26] "Clearly, then, each primary and self-subsistent thing is one and the same as its essence."[27] In short, "Essence is substance."[28] In light of the above, Gilson speaks of Aristotle's metaphysics as a system in which "There is nothing above being; in being there is nothing above form."[29] After noting that, for Aristotle, "Self-subsistent things . . . are the same as their essences,"[30] Marjorie Grene concludes:

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[17] Ibid., 1028a14.

[18] See Gilson, St. Thomas, p. 42.

[19] Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1028a29.

[20] Ibid., 1028b4. See also Joseph Owens, The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics (Toronto, 1951), pp. 321-322.

[21] Ibid., 1017b12.

[22] Aristotle, Categories, 2a12.

[23] Owens, pp. 137-154.

> Substrate is correctly thought to be substance, but primarily with reference to its form, and being-what-it-is is also substance, because, again, the form of the thing--the such that this thing is--is the being-what-it-is, and therefore the substance.[31]

That the primary sense of substance in the philosophy of Aristotle is form is also argued to by Owens:

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[24] Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1028b7.

[25] Ibid., 1028a14. Cf. Ross, p. 166. "In this argument substance is evidently being thought of not as the concrete thing but as the essential nature."

[26] Ibid., 1029b14.

[27] Ibid., 1032a5. See also 1031b19, and Owens, Chapter 10.

[28] Ibid., 1031b32.

[29] Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, 2nd edition (Toronto, 1952), p. 47.

[30] Marjorie Grene, A Portrait of Aristotle (Chicago, 1963), p. 201.

[31] Ibid., p. 203.

> If there is to be universal knowledge of sensible things, such knowledge must be based on the per se identity of the what-IS-Being with the thing itself.[32]

> The form is the primary instance of Entity [substance] in the sensible composite.[33]

In commenting on Aristotle's notion of being St. Thomas cannot help but observe that it signifies not so much esse, but quod est. Aristotle's notion of being penetrates only to what is, not to the act of being; it remains on the level of res habens esse, things having the act of being.

For Aristotle to be is to be a substance and what makes a substance what it is is form. The being of a thing is dependent upon the form. A being is actual to the degree that it realizes its form, and potential to the degree that that form remains unrealized. For St. Thomas, however, form is only the act of whatness; by the form a thing is what it is. But a further determination is needed whereby that form is, i.e., whereby it exercises the act of being (esse). It is this esse which a being must receive per aliud. In short, in the metaphysics of St. Thomas esse is per accidens to essence. For St. Thomas "essence" designates that through which and in which a being has the act of existing;[34] it is that which makes esse to be of this type, but it is not the source or cause of its own act of existing. For St. Thomas no act of existing is due the nature. It is the conclusion of the man and phoenix argument that esse is distinct from essentia. "Ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia vel quidditate."[35]

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[32] Owens, p. 352.

[33] Ibid., p. 355.

[34] See De Ente, Chap. 1, para. 3.

[35] Ibid., Chap. 4, para. 26.

It is impossible that the act of existing be caused, in the sense of efficient cause, by the quiddity. "Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma vel quidditate rei, dico sicut a causa efficiente."[36] The conclusion to be drawn from the above is that those beings whose esse is distinct from their quiddity must have esse from another. "Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res, cuius est aliud quam natura sua, habeat esse ab alio."[37]

Because Aristotle accepts the existence of substance as a given, he asks only what is the cause of its being this kind of substance rather than that one.

> Since we must have the existence of the thing as something given, clearly the question is why the matter is some definite thing; e.g., why are these materials a house? Because that which is the essence of a house is present. . . . Therefore what we seek is the cause, i.e., the form, by reason of which the matter is some definite thing; and this is the substance of the thing.[38]

All of which leads Owens to conclude:

> From the viewpoint of the much later distinction between essence and the act of existing, this treatment must mean that Aristotle is leaving the act of existence entirely outside the scope of his philosophy. The act of existing must be wholly escaping his scientific consideration.[39]

But it is precisely the question "Why is it?" i.e., what is the cause of its exercising the act of existing, that Aquinas seeks to resolve. Why? Because for Aquinas the being of substance is not a given; it must have a cause.

[36] Ibid., para. 27.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1041b3-9.

[39] Owens, p. 309.

I am not suggesting that, alas, St. Thomas simply didn't read his Aristotle carefully and that if he had he surely would not have sought causes of being. Such a view is simply wrong. Aquinas was quite aware of the difference between his own metaphysics and that of Aristotle; he clearly identified precisely this issue of being as the point at which he had to separate himself from The Philosopher. Dividing the history of metaphysical speculation into three periods St. Thomas first distinguishes Plato and Aristotle from the pre-Socratics on the grounds that the former moved beyond a consideration of accidental being to one of essential being.

> Ulterius vero procedentes, distinxerunt per intellectum inter formam substantialem et materiam, quam ponebant increatam; et perceperunt transmutationem fieri in corporibus secundum formas essentiales. . . . Utrique igitur consideraverunt en particulari quadam consideratione, vel inquantum est "hoc ens," vel inquantum est "tale ens." Et sic rebus causas agentes particulares assignaverunt.[40]

Other philosophers, among which St. Thomas clearly numbers himself, advanced still further to a consideration of being as being.

> Et ulterius aliqui erexerunt se ad considerandum ens inquantum est ens: et consideraverunt causam rerum, non solum secundum quod sunt "haec" vel "talia," sed secundum quod sunt "entia."[41]

Aquinas has "advanced further" precisely through pushing the metaphysical Why beyond the whatness of things (i.e., their nature or essence) to the being (esse) of things. No longer is being to be taken as a given; now it is seen as contingent, as precarious, as in need of a cause. It is from this being which is an effect that St. Thomas infers a cause which is the cause of being, God.

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[40] S.T., I, q.44, a.2.

[41] *Ibid.*

Clearly the Thomistic notion of substance is far different from that of Aristotle. The question now must be "Why does Aquinas find the esse of substance to be dependent?"

St. Thomas believes that there is no being except God whose essence or nature it is to exist. Thus, in response to the question "Whether Essence and Being are the Same in God?" he answers in the affirmative.

> Respondeo dicendum quod Deus non solum est sua essentia, ut ostensum est, sed etiam suum esse. . . . Oportet ergo quod illud cuius esse est aliud ab essentia sua, habeat esse causatum ab alio. Hoc autem non potest dici de Deo: quia Deum dicimus esse primam causam efficientem. Impossibile est ergo quod in Deo sit aliud esse, et aliud eius essentia.[42]

We will take up this union of essence and existence in God in later chapters; however, it is necessary to mention it here simply because it has a bearing on the contingent existence of creatures. "The Christian philosophers gathered from the Bible the identity of essence and existence in God; and then could hardly fail to see that such identity exists nowhere save in God."[43] When the Christian thus identifies God and being, "it becomes clear [to him] that there is a sense in which God alone is."[44] It also becomes clear that there is a sense in which all save God is not. "All beings other than God are not their own being, but are beings by participation."[45] What does this all mean? It seems to mean that it is God's essence (and only God's) to exist; the being of God is contingent on no other being (in

[42] S.T., I, q.3, a.4.

[43] Gilson, Spirit, p. 67.

[44] Ibid., p. 65.

[45] S.T., I, q.44, a.1.

fact, it is not contingent at all); it is his nature to be. Creatures, on the other hand, have essences which do not extend to incorporate their existence; it is not their nature to exist; consequently, their existence must be *ab extra*, which is to say that their existence is *per aliud*. St. Thomas believes that the existence of a creature is no part of its essence; consequently, it is not its nature to exist. To demonstrate this he proposes the following argument:

> 1. Whatever is not included in the concept of an essence or quiddity is adventitious; it forms a composition with the essence.
> 2. Every essence or quiddity can be understood without its act of existing being understood.
> 3. Therefore, the act of existing must be other than the essence or quiddity.[46]

As we have seen, the conclusion is that it is impossible that the act of existing itself be caused by the form or quiddity; *esse* (the act of being) must then be *per aliud*. It is precisely this contingency of existence that is the foundation of St. Thomas' argument; only from such an effect, whose *esse* is *per aliud*, is it possible to infer a cause whose *esse* is *per se*, i.e., a being which has existence through itself (which is precisely St. Thomas' name for God). The argument proceeds from beings whose act of existing is other than their nature to that being which exists through itself.

This distinction between the nature of a being and its existence is not original; there are indications that it was present in a limited sense in the writings of Aristotle who distinguished between the questions "What is it?" and "Is it?" In his *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle writes: "The kinds of questions we ask are as many as the kinds of things we know. They are in fact four: . . . (3) whether a thing exists, (4) what is the nature of the thing."[47] That the distinction is made cannot be denied, but it is far removed from the distinction which Aquinas urges. For Aristotle the distinction is epistemological rather than ontological; it concerns questions asked and types of knowledge. He distinguishes two separate acts of the intellect whereby "when we have ascertained the thing's existence, we inquire as to its nature."[48] We may ask "Is it?" or "What is it?"; these are for Aristotle distinct. But we must carefully note that the distinction is purely epistemological; it concerns queries we may launch or knowledge we may entertain; there is no suggestion that these separate questions refer to two distinct metaphysical elements in things. There is in Aristotle no ontological distinction come to haunt us before the time.

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[46] See *De Ente*, Chap. 4, para. 26.

However, when Aristotle was lost to the western world and preserved only in the devout hands of the Arabs, this epistemological distinction took on an added significance. It became real. Two distinct elements were seen in things themselves; in both composite and separate beings there was disclosed a composition between form (in composite beings it is form and matter) and the act of existing. No longer was it simply, as Aristotle had suggested, that knowledge of the nature of a being was distinct from knowledge of its existence. Now the nature of a thing was distinct from its existence. This real distinction of essence and existence may be found again and again in the pages of Arabian philosophers. More than three hundred years before St. Thomas, Alfarabi (d. 950) argued that the distinction between essence and existence is not merely epistemological, but ontological:

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[47] Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, 89b22.

[48] *Ibid.*, b34.

> _Essence_ is the reason why a thing is what it is. _Existence_ is the actuality of the essence.[49]
>
> A real distinction occurs here . . . existence is one thing and essence is another.[50]

In defense of this contention Alfarabi offers an argument which clearly anticipates that of St. Thomas:

> If essence and existence were one thing, then we should be unable to conceive the one without conceiving the other. But, in fact, we are able to conceive essence in itself. If it is true that man has existence by essence, this would be like saying that to conceive man's essence is to imply his existence.[51]

A century later Algazel wrote, "It is therefore clear that being belongs to the order of accidents."[52] This separation of the principle whereby a being has existence is also evident in the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1135-1204). "Each compound substance consists of matter and form, and requires an agent for its existence."[53] This metaphysical distinction between essence and existence reached its fullest expression (prior to St. Thomas) in the hands of Avicenna (980-1037). He believed that there were two distinct principles in things, one governing what a thing is (quiddity) and the other governing that a thing is (esse). For Avicenna things were actualized possibilities and "An actualized possible is an essence to which it happens that it exists."[54] There is nothing in the nature of any thing which "calls for its existence."[55] "No possible essence is endowed with the slightest determination to existence."[56] Consequently, "The analysis of any given being will always fail to detect in it the presence of being."[57] Seeing, then, that the existence of a thing was in no way a consequence of its form (which is far removed from Aristotle's suggestion that knowledge of the existence of a thing does not follow from knowledge of its nature), he concluded that it was an accident. Just as the form desk does not determine that an individual desk be green or brown, so also it does not determine that it exist or not exist. Existence, like color, is an accident.

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[49] Robert Hammond, _The Philosophy of Alfarabi and Its Influence on Medieval Thought_ (New York, 1947), p. 14.

[50] _Ibid._

[51] _Ibid._

[52] Gilson, _St. Thomas_, p. 37.

[53] Moses Maimonides, _The Guide for the Perplexed_, trans. M. Friedlander (New York, 1956), p. 148.

When Aristotle was re-introduced into the West he was accompanied by the illustrious commentaries of Avicenna.[58] Among the first to meet the newly-recovered Aristotle was Albert the Great who in turn introduced him, via Avicenna, to his student Thomas Aquinas.[59] St. Thomas readily accepted the real dichotomy between essence and existence. As we have seen it is fundamental to one of his earliest works, De Ente.

[54] Avicenna, as quoted by Gilson, Being, p. 78.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., p. 79.

[58] See M. D. Chenu, O.P., Toward Understanding St. Thomas, trans. Landry, O.P., and Hughes, O.P. (Chicago, 1964), p. 37. See also D.J.B. Hawkins, A Sketch of Medieval Philosophy (New York, 1949), Chap. IV.

[59] See Copleston, p. 85.

Now it is clear, as Gilson so laboriously points out, that there are profound differences between Avicenna and Aquinas, but in this they are one: no essence but that of God entails existence.[60]

To say that the existence of a thing is distinct from its being is to say that no creature may be a sufficient explanation for its own existence. Such a view is quite contrary to the Aristotelian position which it so often claims as its father. For Aristotle, the existence of a substance is a given.[61] For St. Thomas, the existence of a substance is per aliud; it necessarily has reference to another. "Necesse est dicere omne quod quocumque modo est, a Deo esse."[62] All beings, excepting God, exist by participation. "Sed sicut hic homo participat humanam naturam, ita quodcumque ens creatum participat, ut ita dixerim, naturam essendi."[63] We must be clear as to St. Thomas' meaning when he speaks of things "participating" in being. "Quod enim totaliter est aliquid, non participat illud, sed est per essentiam idem illi. Quod vero non totaliter est aliquid habens aliquid aliud adjunctum, proprie participare dicitur."[64] That is to say, that which is not existence must have existence through another, i.e., it must have its existence through a participation in the being of another.

[60] The differences are best stated by St. Thomas himself; speaking of Avicenna, he writes: "Sed in primo quidem non videtur dixisse recte. Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab ejus essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae." S. Thomae Aquinatis, Metaphysicorum, in Opera Omnia (Parmae, 1852-1873), Bk. IV, L.2, p.344.

[61] Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1041b4.

[62] S.T., I, q.44, a.1.

[63] S.T., q.45, a.5, ad.1.

[64] Metaphysicorum, Bk.I, L.10, p.274.

We must be clear as to the profundity of the contingency of things in St. Thomas' metaphysics. When he says that the esse of a being is per aliud, and hence requires an efficient cause, he is not simply saying that creatures must be made to be. Not only must God cause things to begin to be, he must preserve them in being; not just its becoming, but its continued being is per aliud. Thus Maritain writes, God not only creates, "but God conserves things in being."[65]

To understand this contention it is necessary to turn again to the text of St. Thomas; in his consideration of the "Existence of God in Things" he writes:

> Hunc autem effectum [caused esse] causat Deus in rebus, non solum quando primo esse incipiunt, sed quandiu in esse conservantur; sicut lumen causatur in aere a sole quandiu aer illuminatus manet. Quandiu igitur res habet esse, tandiu oportet quod Deus adsit ei, secundum modum quo esse habet.[66]

Several crucial insights are contained in this important passage.[67] Consider first the example Aquinas suggests to explain the presence of God in things. God, he says, is present to things in the same way that light is present in air. In what way is that? Totally ab extra, totally per aliud, in no way is air the cause of its own illumination. But the example goes farther; the sun does not cause the illumination merely in the sense of an efficient cause or "that to which the original source of motion is due," but as a sustaining cause. That is to say, God is not simply a creator of beings, nor is the sun merely the creator of light in air; on the contrary, God is continuously acting to preserve the being of creatures, just as the continued presence of the sun is necessary for the illumination of air. Remove the sun, or source of light, and the illumination ceases; not a trace of it remains. Similarly, argues St. Thomas, remove God and the being of creatures ceases, ends completely, and is as if it never was.[68] The parallel is profound just as the illumination of air is utterly dependent on the sun, both for its beginning and its continuance, so too is the being of creatures dependent on God.

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[65] Maritain, Approaches, p. 64.

[66] S.T., I, q.8, a.1.

[67] Gilson says of it: "There is no more important and central notion than this one in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas." Elements, p. 196.

The notion St. Thomas is trying to convey is one of "radical contingency," of complete and utter precariousness, of what Maritain refers to as being-with-nothingness. It is being over and against non-being, brought out of non-being by God and forcefully (through an act of conservation) sustained there, held back against the void just as the sun holds back the night.

This awareness of the precariousness of existence and the constant need for conservation is also manifest in the writings of Descartes: "The conservation of a substance, in each moment of its duration, requires the same power and act that would be necessary to create it, supposing it were not yet in existence."[69] To substantiate this conclusion Descartes proposes this most interesting argument. After noting that his life may be understood as a duration composed of an infinite number of parts (or moments), he then suggests that when we realize that each of these parts is autonomous and in no way dependent on the others we will understand that "because I was in existence a short time ago, it does not follow that I must now exist, unless in this moment some cause create me anew."[70] Note the parallel to Aquinas' example of illuminated air; just because the air was illuminated it does not follow that it now is illuminated. Why not? Because the air is not a sufficient condition of its own illumination. In the same way, then, a thing's essence is not the sufficient condition for its own existence. What if it be objected that the being of Socrates, for instance, could be explained simply by reference to Sophroniscus and Phaenarete? Would they constitute an adequate explanation? In a sense they do; they explain, as proximate causes, the coming into being of Socrates. But the theist is arguing not only that Socrates cannot bring himself into being (which Aristotle of course granted), but that his being is so tenuous as to be inadequate to sustain itself. Now, one might suggest Sophroniscus and Phaenarete as the causes of Socrates' becoming, but how do they serve to explain the equal mystery of his enduring; Sophroniscus and Phaenarete may die and yet Socrates lives on. It is not, then, Sophroniscus and Phaenarete that sustain Socrates, nor is he the sufficient explanation of his own existence for if he were he would have existed from all time; still another cause is needed. It is God.

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[68] Cf. Q.104, a.1. "aliquid rem aliquam conservare per se et directe, inquantum scilicet illud quod conservatur, dependet a conservante, ut sine eo esse non possit. Et hoc modo omnes creaturae indigent divina conservatione. Dependet enim esse cuiuslibet creaturae a Deo, ita quod nec ad momentum subsistere possent, sed in nihilum redigerentur, nisi operatione divinae virtutis conservarentur in esse."

[69] Descartes, Meditations, p. 58.

There is an apparent distinction between this notion of substance and that of Aristotle in which being preserves itself. For Aristotle, a thing can perpetuate itself precisely because it has being. For Aquinas, beings do not have being, except from another.

[70] Ibid.

For Aristotle, change and duration do not penetrate to the level of being; it is instead merely the change of accidents or of the form (generation and corruption). For Aquinas, however, to be generated has a much more radical meaning; for him, it is generation *ex nihilo*. To become is not merely to become this or that, to change from this to that, but to pass from non-being to being, from darkness to light.

Note how completely incompatible this Thomistic and Cartesian metaphysics is with the notion of deism, the belief that God caused the universe, but then abandoned it to its own resources. For St. Thomas and Descartes, this would be absurd. It would be like the sun causing the illumination of the air and then abandoning it to proceed on its own against the dark. What is the difference between the two? Clearly it is the status of creatures. For the deist, creatures are insufficient to lift themselves, by their boot-straps so to speak, out of non-being, but once emerged they are substantial (in the Aristotelian sense) beings capable of perpetuating themselves. Not so for St. Thomas' creatures; they are not substantial in the sense of self-sufficient. On the contrary, as Gilson remarked, "Substance does not exist by itself."[71] One may state the difference between the deist's universe and the Christian's in a still more relevant way. St. Thomas believes that God is present in things; the deist does not. God is, for Aquinas, immediately present. Not just present in the remote sense of becoming, but present here and now in this instance of a thing's being. One could not argue to God from a deist's universe. One can, however, argue to God from the Thomistic universe because he is a necessary condition, not only for its becoming (about which we know nothing), but also for its perseverance, with which we are indubitably familiar.

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[71] Gilson, *St. Thomas*, p. 31.

The importance of this divine presence in things is profound. Ultimately it explains why theists so often exclaim that God may be seen everywhere. When Nicholas of Cusa writes in his Vision of God (a most revealing title), "Yea, all things stir me up to turn toward thee,"[72] it is precisely because he is aware of this divine presence. But what does it mean to say that God is present in things? Perhaps it means that to know things is to know them as existing, as exercising the act of being, but to be is no part of the thing itself and hence must be per aliud. The being is thus evidence of the presence of that "other."[73] To express it in Thomistic terms, things themselves are not the cause of their own being, yet they are; they can be only by God's here and now presence in them. That is why Nicholas may ask the not entirely rhetorical question, "What is easier than to believe in God?"[74] He cannot help but see God wherever he casts his glance. To behold the being of creatures is to behold a limited and partial expression of the being of God. Why? Because no creature has being, but from God.

In conclusion, the per aliud to which the theist points in the cosmological proofs for the existence of God must, as we have said, be understood to have reference to the very being (esse) of things. In the metaphysics which underlies these proofs sensible substances are understood to be radically contingent. The awareness of this contingency is due primarily to the theist's belief that a thing's act of existence is *per accidens* to its essence. We must now turn to the atheist's response to this distinction and his reasons for rejecting it.

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[72] Nicholas of Cusa, p. 129.

[73] See Otto, p. 28.

[74] Nicholas of Cusa, p. 125.

CHAPTER V

In chapter four we indicated that the apprehension of beings as existentially per aliud was the foundation of the cosmological arguments for the existence of God. Without the affirmation that "There exists a per aliud," the inference of the major premise, "If per aliud then per se," remains only hypothetical. We have previously criticized that inference itself on the grounds that it relies on several unnecessary presuppositions, i.e., unnecessary in the sense that assent is not rationally nor empirically required. In this chapter we intend to explain the atheist's objections to this existential premise by which the otherwise hypothetical inference is allowed to conclude to the existence of a per se.

The non-theist denies the theist's contention that there exists a per aliud. At first sight this seems rather astounding, even to the non-theist. We all live in the world of Heraclitus in which "You could not step twice in the same rivers; for other and yet other waters are ever flowing on,"[1] a world in which "All things arise [and pass away] through strife."[2] How could anyone who moves through and in the flux of this changing world fail to recognize the contingency rampant in it? That is precisely the issue to which we must address ourselves in the following pages. We will begin with the question how can the non-theist deny the existence of per alia; then (as we did in the case of the theist)[3] we will attempt to penetrate to the presuppositions upon which this denial rests.

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[1] Milton C. Nahm, Selections from Early Greek Philosophy, 3d edition (New York, 1934), p. 91.

[2] Ibid., p. 92.

Section I: Does there exist a per aliud?

The propositions to be proved in this section are two: first, that the premise, "There exists a per aliud," is not verifiable a posteriori; second, that it is dependent upon a priori factors.

There is an ambiguity in the notion of "per aliud" or "contingent." A being which is per aliud is one which depends on another, i.e., which is conditioned by another. But a thing may depend on another in many ways. It may depend on another, for one or more of its non-essential qualities, as Socrates depends on his teacher for his coming to be educated; or it may depend on another for its essential qualities, as Socrates depends in some way on Sophroniscus and Phaenarete for his coming to be a man; or finally it may be existentially dependent, and thus depend on another for its existence.[4] When the atheist denies that things are per aliud he is not denying that existing things are accidentally or even essentially contingent, rather he denies that they are existentially contingent. He does not accept the "fact" of contingency in the order of existence. But, as we have seen above,[5] it is precisely that sense of contingency that is the foundation of the cosmological argument. As I see it, if one grants contingency in the order of existence he will be compelled (there is no denying the theist on this) to grant necessity in the order of existence. And necessity in the order of existence is I am Who am.

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[3] See above, pp. 100-117.

[4] I will specify this contingency as our discussion proceeds. See below, pp. 121-122, 130.

[5] See above, pp. 93-99.

Let us explore the ambiguity of "per aliud" more extensively. There is a vast difference between the belief that a ball's motion is per aliud and that the ball itself is per aliud. That the motion of a ball is through another is empirically verifiable and may be freely admitted by the critic. But a question arises when it is suggested that the ball itself is per aliud. We must bear in mind that it is one thing to maintain that some quality (e.g., motion or purposiveness) of a thing is contingent and quite another to argue that the thing itself is contingent. It is the difference between being accidentally per aliud and essentially or substantially per aliud. This distinction is present in Aristotle;[6] he distinguishes the "qualified becoming" of accidents (e.g., the unmusical Socrates becoming musical) from the "unqualified becoming" of substances (e.g., the non-Socrates becoming Socrates). A transfer must be made from the contention that a quality of a thing is per aliud to the contention that a thing itself is per aliud. That is presumedly done as follows: Q (the quality) is per aliud; Q is a property of x; therefore x is per aliud. This is a legitimate inference, but only to a limited extent. We may conclude that x is per aliud only to the extent that it is characterized by Q. In the case of motion, for example, if motion is judged to be contingent we may then judge that a moving ball is contingent--but only in its movement. It does not follow that other qualities of the ball, or the ball itself, is contingent.

[6] Aristotle, Physics, Bk. I, Chap. 7.

But clearly, the theist is not speaking of accidental or qualified causality when he judges things to be per aliud; he is pointing to substantial, unqualified causality. That is to say, he is not saying that qualities of things are effects whose cause must be ab extra, but that the beings themselves, i.e., the substances, are caused by another. We must then try to discern exactly what is meant by this unqualified contingency of substances. It seems to mean that the substance itself (and not just one or more of its qualities) is caused by another. Now even this unqualified contingency is not necessarily objectionable. There is an ambiguity in saying that a substance is caused. To be caused may refer to the becoming of a substance, i.e., to its being this rather than that, or to be caused may refer to the being of a substance, i.e., to its exercising the act of existing. The ambiguity here lies in the distinction between made to be in the sense of made to become what it is and made to be in the sense of made to exist. St. Thomas employs this distinction quite effectively.

> Omnis enim effectus dependet a sua causa, secundum quod est causa eius. Sed considerandum est quod aliquod agens est causa sui effectus secundum fieri tantum, et non directe secundum esse eius.[7]

For instance, says St. Thomas, a builder may cause the becoming of a house and yet not be the cause of its being (as is evidenced by the fact that the house is able to subsist apart from the builder). He is the cause of this matter receiving this form, but that is only to be the cause of becoming. This distinction between cause of becoming and cause of being is also apparent in the case of natural beings.

> Et simili ratione est considerandum in rebus naturalibus. Quia si aliquod agens non est causa formae inquantum

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[7] S.T., I, q.104, a.1.

> huiusmodi, non erit per se causa esse quod consequitur ad talem formam, sed erit causa effectus secundum fieri tantum.[8]

That the becoming of a thing is an effect is perfectly acceptable to the atheist; he will not deny that it requires a cause. But that the being of a thing is an effect and consequently requires a cause, he does not grant. It is this contention, that esse is caused, that is unacceptable. We call contingency in becoming "natural contingency" and contingency in being "radical contingency."

Still another distinction must be made; there are two senses in which a thing may be said to be a cause of being. The first is indirectly, as when a man preserves the being of a child when he frustrates a cause of its destruction, e.g., fire. The second, direct causation, is evident when the effect cannot exist without the cause; it is in this sense that all creatures are said to be dependent on God.

> Alio modo dicitur aliquid rem aliquam conservare per se et directe, inquantum scilicet illud quod conservatur, dependet a conservante, ut sine eo esse non possit. Et hoc modo omnes creaturae indigent divina conservatione. Dependet enim esse cuiuslibet creaturae a Deo, ita quod nec ad momentum subsistere possent, sed in nihilum redigerentur, nisi operatione divinae virtutis conservarentur in esse.[9]

As we saw in chapter four it is this radical sense of contingency, contingency in esse that is the foundation of the cosmological arguments. We must now ask whether this kind of contingency empirically is manifest so that it can provide an a posteriori foundation for the argument.

Consider the kind of effects which might be suggested in support of any claim of dependency. We could say, a posteriori, that a ball is in motion, and that its motion requires a cause. But that is merely qualified change and as we have said that is not the sort of contingency that is appealed to in proofs for the existence of God. But what about substantial, unqualified change, i.e., generation and corruption. I am here speaking of the cause of a thing being this kind of substance, i.e., possessing this form. Clearly the fact that this matter is a man needs an explanation, but this is simply a cause of becoming.

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid. See below, p. 130, for a further consideration of this contingency.

> Sed potest esse causa huiusmodi formae secundum quod est in materia, idest quod haec materia acquirat hanc formam. Et hoc est esse causa secundum fieri; sicut cum homo generat hominem.[10]

The question is, is there any evidence (a posteriori) of that caused being, that radical contingency, from which the cosmological arguments proceed. I think not. No matter what change is appealed to as evidence of contingency, the fact is that it will be evidence only of natural contingent becoming and natural contingent being, not radical contingent being, as will become evident in what follows.

No matter what change may be suggested, even the chemical change of acids into salt water by the addition of bases, there remains a substratum. Even such profound changes as those of molecules presuppose the constancy of atoms. In every instance some "matter" remains constant. And so long as some matter perseveres the contingency is only one of becoming or of continued being, rather than of being simply.

What's wrong? The problem is that the critic has been speaking of changes, alterations which necessarily presuppose a substratum. It must now become apparent that to be existentially per aliud, in the sense in which the theist employs the term, is not to change. To change is to become this rather that that. When the Christian refers to a thing's having been made to be he is speaking of an effect which is not the result of a change, a coming to be which is not a coming to be this but rather simply coming to be--beginning to exist where once there was no existence at all, no presupposed substratum. The existential contingency to which he calls attention is not a change. It is this contingency which is neither understood nor allowed by the atheist. The fact is that the atheist's notion of contingency is limited to 1) that sort of change or becoming which is the transition from one state to another; and to 2) that sort of change which results in the continued being of a thing.[11] The word "transformation" is appropriate for this sort of contingency since it involves simply the change of form, this form being replaced by that form. Which is to say, becoming in the sense of becoming this type of being rather than that.

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[10] Ibid.

As we have seen there is an ambiguity in the theist's use of "contingent" or "per aliud." The distinction must be made between being contingent or dependent on another for one's becoming and being contingent upon another for one's being. In the first sense your becoming this is the effect; in the second, your being itself is the effect.

The theist's argument begins with the a posteriori assertion of contingency, the dependence of one contingent being on another. He commences, then, with the statement that one or more beings are not self-sufficient, and hence that they are dependent upon other entities. This contingency is empirically evident in the phenomenon of change, but by that very factor it must be the natural contingency whereby a thing becomes what it is "through another." These natural effects can lead only to natural causes; they are not sufficient grounds for an inference to God. However, after one has concluded to the contingency of the entire series of caused causes by means of the impossibility of an infinite regress another sense of contingency becomes apparent. This is what we have referred to, using Gilson's term, as "radical contingency." In this sense of contingency a thing is not merely dependent upon other natural beings; here it is argued that since the totality of all natural things is itself contingent, no particular being may be adequately comprehended or explained apart from the explanation which is sufficient to cause that totality of natural things.[12] In the movement from the dependency of the individual on another to that of the whole there is a shift in the meaning of "per aliud." No longer is it simply contingent upon other members of the series of natural causes; now, given the precarious nature of that series as a whole, it is directly contingent upon a transcendent per se. It is directly contingent because it is now dependent not only in its becoming this rather than that, but in its existing at all rather than not existing at all, and the only sufficient cause of its existing at all must be that which has existence from no other, but in and of itself. It is this radical sense of contingency, which is in no way empirically manifest, which precludes the possibility of any satisfactory explanation solely in terms of other members of the series.

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[11] See below, p. 130.

We have been discussing the ambiguity in the notion that a thing is made to be by another. To say that a thing is made to be is to say that its "isness" is caused. But to understand what that means we must know in what sense "is" is being used. Consider the distinction between the propositions, "X is," and "X is a man." The former asserts that there is an X, i.e., that X exists. The latter merely identifies what X is--it does not assert whether or not there is such an X. We face here the well-known distinction between the "is" of the existential judgment and the "is" of the copula. One has to do with the fact that a thing is; the other with what a thing is. To say that the fact that X is a man is caused, i.e., that one must explain why this matter has this form, makes sense to the non-theist and the theist alike; it is intelligible. From it we learn that an explanation for X's becoming a man rather than a dog must be sought. But to say that the fact that X is must be caused is not intelligible to the non-theist. Why not? Because it demands an awareness of a contingency in being which is not a mere contingency in being this; i.e., an awareness of what Maritain refers to as "Being-with-nothingness." How is the atheist to acquire this awareness? What proof can the theist cite?

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[12] See Russell and Copleston, p. 173.

Having identified the ambiguity that is present in the claim that a thing is per aliud we must now turn our attention to the verification of the existence of contingent or per aliud being. It is claimed that this verification is a posteriori. But why then is it not manifest to the atheist? The reason is that the proposition, "There exists a per aliud," is not verifiable a posteriori. No thing is perceived as per aliud--it is interpreted or argued to as being per aliud. In beginning an a posteriori proof one may affirm sensually that there exist things in motion, but not that nothing can move itself. That there exist things in motion is empirically verifiable, that things in motion require an explanation is not. In other words, verification of "exists" is _a posteriori_, but not of "_per aliud_"--that must be _a priori_. We are not arguing here anything which would not be freely granted by St. Thomas himself. That a given existence is _per aliud_ is a judgment which is dependent upon the explanatory system (i.e., metaphysics) which is being employed; anyone who dissents from that system is free to dissent from the judgment "_per aliud_." The great problem in beginning an argument with the assertion that there exists a _per aliud_, i.e., something which is not self-sufficient or self-explanatory, is that what is or is not self-explanatory is a function of the particular metaphysics you bring to the apprehension of that entity. Things are not _in themselves_ intelligible or unintelligible, but only in terms of some explanatory framework. What I am suggesting is that "_per aliud_" is a relative, not an absolute, judgment. And moreover that it is an _a priori_, not an _a posteriori_, judgment.

Consider just one of the many examples of this relativity furnished by science:[13] Prior to Newton, when science was still very much under the influence of Aristotle, the phenomenon of movement required an explanation; its absence, rest, did not. But after Newton's _Principia Mathematica_, motion was understood as self-explanatory and rest required an explanation. Pre-Newtonian physics regarded motion as _per aliud_, i.e., as contingent; it was a phenomenon whose explanation had to be sought outside itself. Post-Newtonian physics, on the contrary, saw motion as a given and believed that rest was _per aliud_ and hence not self-sufficient; i.e., it believed that the phenomenon of rest was an effect, that it could not be understood in terms of itself but only in relation to another. Clearly the judgment of contingency is dependent upon what is accepted, in any particular explanatory framework, as given. If motion is a given then rest will be *per aliud*; if rest is given then motion will be *per aliud*. What has changed such that the motion of a planet is at one time contingent and at another time not? Clearly, not the planet. The only thing which has changed is the explanatory system that is being employed in discussing the planet. Additional examples of this relativity could easily be cited. E.g., what is a derived theorem in one logic may be an axiom in another, etc. The point is that while the existence of a thing is verifiable *a posteriori*, its contingency is not. The judgment of that contingency is relative, being dependent upon the particular metaphysics that is being used. If this be, in fact, the case then it is not difficult to see that the theist is going to have a very difficult task in convincing the atheist of this contingency when 1) it is not subject to empirical confirmation, and 2) it is dependent upon a metaphysics which the atheist does not accept.

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[13] An interesting treatment of this may be found in Walter Kaufmann, pp. 141-142.

Granted that radical contingency, i.e., contingency in being as opposed to merely in becoming, is not *a posteriori*, that it is not contained in any human experience, it might still be argued that there is empirical evidence for this radical contingency, even though it is not itself empirically manifest. What if it be objected, for example, that although radical contingency is not sense observable (and hence not verifiable *a posteriori*), *change* is sensed and is verifiable *a posteriori*. It might then be argued, as Maritain does, that "change implies contingency."[14] This is an appropriate objection and one which,

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[14] Maritain, *Approaches*, p. 47.

I believe, must be granted. But granted that change implies contingency, the problem of ambiguity is once again germane. What kind of contingency, radical or natural, is implied? Change is evidence only of the natural contingency of becoming. It provides no evidence of a contingency in being. What is contingent, what must be explained, is not the being or existence (which remains a given), but the kind of existence, i.e., the becoming this. If by contingency you wish to indicate what we have called the natural dependency of one thing on another for its nature or qualities, then change does imply contingency. Thus, when a thing changes (either essentially or accidentally) we quite legitimately seek the cause of that transition. Change is evidence of contingency, but changes are from this to that; they are contingent in becoming what they are, not in existing. But as we have said that radical contingency which is the foundation of the cosmological arguments is not a change and hence is not possibly sense observable; it is a contingency in being, not in becoming. The only a posteriori manifestation of contingency is that present in the phenomenon of change; change does imply contingency, but only the natural contingency of becoming; it is not evidence of radical contingency of being itself.

The question must arise, is natural contingency evidence for radical contingency? Is caused becoming evidence for caused being? No, it is not. Caused becoming presupposes being; it is a change in the kind or type of being. Far from evidencing a causation in existence, qua existence, it is evidence of a constancy in existence. To be able to become something else is not evidence that a thing is able not to be, only that it is able not to be this. In the third way

St. Thomas cites the fact that things come to be and pass out of being as evidence for the contingency of their existence itself. But as we have seen there is an ambiguity in the notion of being and hence in the notion of the possibility of being. To say that it is possible for a thing to be or not to be may simply mean that it is possible for it to become or not become *this* (in fact this is the only sort of contingency that we have any evidence for at all); it need not mean that it is possible to exist or not to exist.

There is a clear difference between the empirical evidence needed to substantiate natural contingency, i.e., the essential or accidental dependence of one thing upon another, and that which would be needed to substantiate radical contingency. For instance, we may distinguish two senses of natural contingency; a being may be dependent upon another for its becoming (i.e., its becoming *this*) or it may be dependent upon another for its continued being. Socrates is contingent in the first sense on Sophroniscus and Phaenarete, i.e., for his becoming; he is contingent in the second sense, i.e., for his continued existence, on air, food, water, etc. The former may be confirmed by noting that parents are involved in every known instance of childbirth; the one is always preceded by the other. The latter may be experimentally verified by depriving Socrates of air, water, etc. However, when the theist claims that there is a radical contingency, such that apart from God nothing could be, i.e., that God is a necessary condition for the existence of creatures, it is impossible to envision any possible *a posteriori* verification for that claim. Any empirical evidence would be evidence of change--which is caused becoming or caused continuance in being but not caused existence.

If, as we have argued, there is no empirical justification for the judgment of radical contingency, what is it which leads the theist to make that judgment? If the contingency of being is not empirically meaningful, in what sense is it meaningful? The answer must lie in the fact that the theist accepts "necessary being" as meaningful, and I mean here necessary in the order of existence. Perhaps what I am suggesting will be made clear if I recount part of a conversation I recently had with a theist who was willing to defend the notion of radical contingency:

> He: Don't you grant that there may be different kinds of existence?
>
> I: No, I think the existence of a desk is precisely the same, *qua* existence, as that of a man.
>
> He: Well, I agree that the existence of a desk and a man are the same. They are both instances of "contingent" existence. But don't you admit the possibility of a different *kind* of existence?
>
> I: Such as?
>
> He: Necessary existence; an existence which cannot not be, one whose essence it is to exist.
>
> I: No. Perhaps that is why I don't grant "contingent" existence.
>
> He: Why?
>
> I: Because for me, not knowing any necessary existence there is no need to distinguish it from non-necessary existence. Consequently the terms "contingent" and "necessary" have no meaning for me when applied to existence.

The point I wish to suggest in the above is that the entire idea of contingent existence is itself contingent on the idea of necessary existence. If you don't subscribe to the latter, i.e., if "necessary existence" is not meaningful, the former is also meaningless. But the non-theist is one who does not accept the latter and hence no argument based on the former can possibly be cogent for him.

I am arguing that the meaningfulness of what Maritain calls "Being-with-nothingness," i.e., of existentially per aliud creatures, is dependent on the meaningfulness of "Being-without-nothingness." That is why Maritain is able to maintain that "Being-with-nothingness . . . implies, in order that it should be, Being-without-nothingness."[15] The fact is that "contingent" and "necessary" are reciprocal terms; like right and left, if one is applied it can only be in contrast to the other. Thus if one can legitimately speak of contingent being it is only because one can legitimately speak of necessary being. Here it is all or nothing. If you grant the meaningfulness of "contingent being" you must grant that of "necessary being." The question is, are there any reasons for granting the meaningfulness of "contingent being." I would suggest that there is empirical evidence only for a contingency in becoming--not in being.

Barring empirical evidence, there is perhaps a psychological justification for the belief that things are existentially contingent. This psychological dependence of the notion of existential contingency on a simultaneous notion of existential necessity is made manifest in the articulate work of Rudolph Otto who has so thoroughly and insightfully explored the idea of contingency or, as he would say, of "creature-consciousness" or "creaturehood." I have in mind particularly The Idea of the Holy in which Otto writes:

> . . . the "creature feeling" is itself a first subjective concomitant and effect of another feeling element, which

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[15] Ibid., p. 20.

> casts it like a shadow, but which in itself indubitably has immediate and primary reference to . . . "The numinous."[16]

Otto explicitly denies (as would I) that the per se is to be inferred from the per aliud;[17] on the contrary, the very awareness of the per aliud is a consequence of the prior apprehension (obviously not a posteriori) of the per se. When Otto defines "creature-consciousness" as "the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness [Cf. Maritain's Being-with-nothingness] in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures,"[18] he is clearly aware of the fact that consciousness of limited being is possible only if juxtaposed to one of unlimited being. If, as Otto maintains, "For the 'creature-feeling' and the sense of dependence to arise in the mind the 'numen' must be experienced as present,"[19] it is not difficult to understand why the atheist does not share the theist's apprehension of this existential contingency.

In speaking of "existential contingency" we sought first empirical evidence; failing that we suggested that the term could be meaningful only when the meaningfulness of "existential necessity" was granted. We further suggested, following Otto, that the psychological state in which one "feels" existential contingency may well be dependent on an experience of "existential necessity." Both these are useful explanations of the theist's employment of the term "existential contingency." He is raised in a culture in which "existential necessity"

[16] Otto, p. 10.

[17] Here Otto is criticizing Schleiermacher.

[18] Otto, p. 10. Italics mine.

[19] Ibid., p. 11.

is a meaningful term. But of course many atheists are raised in a similar culture. It would seem that they should also acknowledge the meaningfulness of "existential contingency." But to be meaningful can be understood in the more profound psychological sense of Otto. In this sense it might be said that the atheist does not find "existential contingency" meaningful because he has not experienced "existential necessity"--i.e., because he has not felt God. But here we return to the question of whether or not this awareness can be engendered through a consideration of natural beings.

In much of the recent conduct of the debate about the existence of God the non-theist has been seen to argue that the notion of contingency, like that of necessity, is applicable only to propositions. To say that things are not contingent is, however, perhaps too strong a statement; it is at least misleading. In their often quoted debate when Russell objects that things are not contingent, Copleston correctly responds,

> After all, a "contingent" being is a being which has not in itself the complete reason for its existence. . . . The existence of neither of us can be explained without reference to something or somebody outside us, our parents, for example.[20]

Copleston's point is well made; we are effects whose being must be explained by our parents. But here the question is again, in what sense do they explain our being? Are they causes of our existence or are they causes of our becoming this (of having this form or nature)? If they are causes of our existence, of our being something rather than nothing at all, then we could not exist apart from them. But clearly we do. They must then be causes of our becoming this rather than that. In that sense, in the sense of essential or accidental qualities, it is perhaps legitimate to speak of contingent beings. I would suggest that the notion of contingency need not be (artificially) limited to logical assertions; it is equally applicable to things, but to the becoming of things--not their existence.

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[20] Russell and Copleston, p. 171.

There are three distinct aspects to the affirmation of the existence of a per aliud. First that some thing exists; second that the existing thing has a certain quality (e.g., motion); and finally that the thing is contingent.

We have spoken now of the ambiguity in the notion of contingency. And we have argued first that radical contingency is not manifest a posteriori; second, that it is a derivative notion which has linguistic meaning only in a system in which "necessary being" has meaning; and third that the psychological awareness of existential contingency is a consequence of the awareness of existential necessity. It has been our contention that while the assertion of the existence of a being is a posteriori, the judgment that the existence and not simply the becoming of that being is contingent is not. We must now turn our attention to the a posteriori apprehension of things.

Consider the first way; it begins, "There exist things in motion." There are two separate claims being made. First that something exists, and second that it is in motion. Which is to say, 1) There exists an x, and 2) x has the quality M. Both these assertions may be verified a posteriori. But what of the other arguments, the variations of cosmological proof. They also contain the separate contentions 1) there exists an x, 2) x has the quality M. But are they both verifiable a posteriori? The shortest glance is sufficient to confirm that they are not. In the second way it is said things exist (a posteriori) and that there is an order of efficient causes. Efficient causality is not, however, a posteriori. Similarly in the third proof, things are said to exist with the characteristic of possibility; but that a thing is possible is not to be ascertained empirically. The a priori nature of these assertions is even more manifest in the fourth proof in which things are said to have the quality of being "more or less good"--a quality which is clearly not empirical. In the fifth way it is said that things have the quality of "acting for an end," but obviously this is an a priori judgment and not a posteriori. Finally in the De Ente argument it is said that beings exist in which essence and existence are distinct. Now that beings exist is verifiable a posteriori--that their existence is distinct from their essence is not.

That the motion of a thing is per aliud may easily be verified a posteriori. However, that is not the case with efficient causality in the order of being, or with possibility, or purposiveness, or goodness, or existence distinct from essence. The reason it is not is that none of these are sensual qualities; they are characteristics which have significance to the intellect only--not to the senses. Thus the goodness of a thing is not evident a posteriori, only that a thing exists; we judge it to be more or less good. One must be very clear as to exactly what is being claimed on a posteriori grounds. If it is the existence of a particular individual there is no objection; but if it is a particular quality of that individual we must hesitate. So far as I can see the only one of the qualities suggested in the cosmological arguments which is verifiable a posteriori is motion. At least in the proof from motion there is an a posteriori apprehension of movement. But as argued above, the contingency of things in motion is itself not a posteriori. In the other proofs there is not even this limited empirical verification of the quality attributed to the existent.

The motion of a being is empirically verifiable because it is a change; clearly purposiveness, goodness, and an existence distinct from essence are not manifest in any change and are therefore not verifiable a posteriori. On the contrary, they are obviously a priori judgments. But what of efficient causation or of possibility? It would seem that these have some empirical evidence to support them. Perhaps so, but what sort of evidence? One might claim that we can see the effect that a sculptor creates when he makes a statue out of a block of marble. Or one might contend that the flux of ordinary beings is empirical evidence for "possibility." But in each instance the argument hinges on the a posteriori apprehension of some change, some movement from this to that. It is evidence that the becoming of the entity is contingent--not its existence.

To summarize this section: The theist asserts a posteriori the contingency of existing things, that there exist things which are per aliud, i.e., whose being is contingent. Now this can mean two things, that their existence (esse) is caused or that their becoming this (what they are) is caused. In either case we must object that the contingency of things is an a priori relation of the mind and in no way manifest in a posteriori sensations. There are, however, some a posteriori considerations which bear upon the judgment that a thing is contingent; they are all varieties of change. If the theist cites this change as evidence for the contingency of things he will be able to verify his claim a posteriori, but it will not serve as grounds for inferring a cause of existence--only a cause of becoming. If, however, he understands the contingency to be a radical dependence in being, such that the very existence of creatures is judged to be an effect, then he will have grounds for arguing _quia_ to a cause of existence. But in this latter case the contingency cited does not refer to a mere change in being, i.e., becoming, but rather to a dependency in being itself; consequently because this contingency _will not manifest itself in any change_ there will be no _a posteriori_ evidence to support the assumption of such a _per aliud_. If the first alternative is selected there will be empirical evidence for the contingency, but that contingency will not be sufficient for the inference to a cause of existence. If the second alternative is chosen the inference will be tenable, but it will remain merely hypothetical since there will be no _a posteriori_ verification that there exists such a contingent being. The only possible solution to this dilemma would lie in the deduction of radical contingency from the fact of natural contingency, of a dependency in existence from one in becoming, and we have precluded that alternative.

Section II: Metaphysical presuppositions.

We must turn our attention now to the opposing metaphysics which underlie the assertion and the denial of this existential contingency. The theist sees the being of the things of this world as _per aliud_, as caused, and seeks their cause. The non-theist accepts their being as a given and regards only their becoming as caused; he seeks not a cause of their existence, but of their becoming this kind of existence. There is here a disagreement about what aspects of beings are to be judged _per aliud_; is it their becoming or their being? We

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argued in section one that the judgment as to what is or is not contingent is a function of the explanatory system used. We must now explore the metaphysics which call forth these opposing judgments.

The most outstanding characteristic of the theist's metaphysics is his belief that the being of creatures is not their own, or as Aquinas would say, that their existence is distinct from their essence. This metaphysics is at the heart of the theist's judgment that creatures are Beings-with-nothingness. It cannot be said of them that they _are_ being, only that they have it. Furthermore they have it by a form of participation; they have being only to the extent that they participate in that being which _is_ being. Let us begin, then, with the essence/existence distinction.

I intend to argue that the distinction between essence and existence is an artificial dichotomy which has arisen due to a confusion between the judgments of the intellect and the condition of the external world. Essence is an intellectual abstraction. Considered in itself, as if it were a reality, some further factor is required in order for it to exist. That is, in fact, exactly St. Thomas' argument in _De Ente_. He argues that from the concept "man" it cannot be determined whether or not such a creature exists. In that he is correct. It follows that existence is not a part of the concept of the essence of anything. But is existence distinct from essence _in re_ or just _in mente_? Granted the mind separates essence and existence, are they in fact distinct? They are distinct _in mente_ because we have abstracted the _what_ from the _that_. But it is only after we have performed this abstraction that essence seems so pale; it is only then that essence appears insufficient to _be_. But what has happened? We have withdrawn a part (the essence) and proclaimed that it is not the whole (the subsisting thing). In this we are doubtless right. But is reality itself a conglomerate? Is it a unity of parts?

Consider now St. Thomas' famous "Man and Phoenix" argument.[21] It does not in fact establish the essence/existence distinction. The argument simply notes that from the concept "man" one cannot determine whether or not a man exists. But this is no different from Aristotle's original notion; it is an epistemological argument, not a metaphysical one. It argues that the concept of essence does not include that of existence, that this act of the intellect is insufficient to comprehend existence.

But our criticism may be even more profound. On what grounds could one possibly establish the essence/existence distinction in things? It might be suggested that the distinction is confirmed by the fact that my concept of "table" continues after the table has been destroyed. But this is unacceptable since we are concerned with essence in the table and my concept is, whether or not the table is present, something distinct from the table. So far as I can see, the only way to establish the essence/existence distinction on an objective ontological level would be to discover either a non-existent essence or an existence which has no essence. Both are absurdities. The former seeks a what which is not a that--which could only be in mente, never in re; the latter seeks a that which is not a what--but that would be a thing which is not a thing for us and clearly could not be apprehended (since whatever is apprehended is a what). The fact is essence is distinct from existence only after we abstract the what from the that; they are not distinct prior to the mental act of separation.

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[21] De Ente, Chap. 4, para. 26.

But having raised the question of the essence/existence distinction, having argued that it is purely mental and that it cannot possibly be rested on any a posteriori evidence, we must now take up the question we have made central to our investigation of these cosmological arguments. Why does the theist see this distinction in phenomena, and why doesn't the atheist?

In the first section of this chapter we suggested that the notion of contingency could develop only over and against that of necessity. We tried to argue that if one does not grant the meaningfulness of necessary existence then the meaningfulness of contingent existence will not be granted either. Thus we suggested that when Maritain speaks of Being-with-nothingness his words can be significant only to those who are willing to speak of Being-without-nothingness. In short, I argued that contingent existence could not be appreciated apart from an appreciation of necessary existence. My criticism is, then, not unlike that of Farrer who writes:

> The evident weakness of the essence-existence argument is that non-obviousness of its finite base. Has it really any base at all? Does the distinction "essence-existence" arise at all, without the implicit application of the idea of the infinite?[22]

Granted Farrer had a particular axe to grind, and it is not the one I am honing. But the criticisms are fundamentally the same. Farrer argues that finitude and infinitude are reciprocal terms, terms that have meaning only in relation to one another. I am making a similar suggestion with regard to contingent being and necessary being, or "Being-with-nothingness" and "Being-without-nothingness."

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[22] Austin Farrer, Finite and Infinite (Westminster, 1943), p. 267.

There is, moreover, still another dimension in this reciprocal relation, a dimension which becomes apparent in the doctrine of creation. Not only is contingent being related to necessary being; it is also related to non-being. Perhaps this may be made more clear by using Maritain's terms. I suggest that there are, in the theist's scheme of things, three ontological levels: Non-being, Being-with-nonbeing, and Being-without-nonbeing. To speak of Being-with-nonbeing is to speak of that middle ground which is suspended between the two poles of being and non-being. The belief in the possibility of creation entails a belief in the possibility of non-being. Perhaps the following metaphor, borrowed from Plato, will help to clarify my meaning. The theist's world is woven from being and non-being. The warp of being moves through the woof of non-being and a fabric of being with non-being is produced. Such a fabric is impossible for anyone who is lacking either the warp or the woof, either being or non-being. The atheist is such a man. The theist is one who sees the threads of the fabric and sees that they extend beyond the fabric itself, who sees that there is a being which does not intersect non-being. What but this explains the theist's seeing God in the world; he sees the thread of being in the Being-with-nothingness.

"The origin of the notion of existence, as distinct from the notion of essence, is religious and tied up with the notion of creation."[23] To appreciate this insight one must recognize the history of the essence/existence distinction. A cursory account of some of its more important moments was given in the preceding chapter. We noted there that the distinction is to be found in Aristotle albeit in an

[23] Gilson, Being, p. 62.

epistemological context. The next time it raises its head in the history of Western philosophy it is wrapped in an Arab kafieh.

Something separates Aristotle and Alfarabi such that for the former essence and existence are together in fact but separate in intellect while for the latter they are separate in both fact and intellect. Aristotle was a Greek; he believed in the eternity of the universe. Alfarabi was a Moslem; he accepted (as does the Christian St. Thomas) the old testament account of creation. I submit that it is only on the assumption of creation that the real distinction of essence and existence is required. It is only on the supposition of creation, as indicated above, that there can be any becoming which is "coming to be" and not merely "coming to be this"; only on this supposition is existence a difference, and consequently a principle of being. In fact, the communication of existence (*esse*) to essence is conceivable only in terms of creation. Granted we have difficulty in not thinking of it as a change--but to change is not to receive *esse*. If existence is taken as a given (as it was by the Greeks and as it is by the non-theist) then to become is merely to change, to alter the form of existence. In such a metaphysics the principle of essence is sufficient to explain the being of things. It is sufficient because only their *becoming this* requires an explanation.

> As soon [however] as the sensible world is regarded as the result of a creative act, which not only gives it existence but conserves it in existence . . . it becomes so utterly dependent as to be struck through with contingency down to the very roots of its being.[24]

By "the very roots of its being" Gilson means not "its becoming this" but its being, its unqualified act of existence. On this supposition the world and the being of which it is composed are rendered "radically contingent," contingent in the order of existence such that they might not have been. "The created world of Thomistic substances is radically contingent in its very existence, because it might never have existed."[25] But to say that they might not have been is a real option (not that they might not have been this, but that they might not have existed at all), is to admit that a further principle of being is necessary if we are to explain creatures. No longer will it be sufficient to determine why they are what they are (as Gilson maintains Aristotle did); now, on the hypothesis of creation, we must also seek that principle whereby they are, whereby they exercise the act of being as distinct from simply becoming this. St. Thomas uses precisely this distinction in comparing his metaphysics with that of Aristotle.

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[24] Gilson, *Spirit*, p. 71.

> Philosophus in I Physic, loquitur de fieri particulari, quod est de forma in formam, sive accidentalem sive substantialem: nunc autem loquimur de rebus secundum emanationem earum ab universali principio essendi.[26]

We sometimes fail to see the profound ramifications of the doctrine of creation. The Western theistic intellect has become so accustomed to thinking in these terms that none other are conceivable to it. It must not be forgotten that creation has profound metaphysical consequences. It is the belief that being is an effect, and hence that being requires a cause.

If it is true that the distinction between essence and existence stems from the doctrine of creation, what follows? Does that make it any less true? No, it does not. The source of the distinction makes

[25] Gilson, Being, p. 160.

[26] S.T., I, q.44, a.2, ad.1.

no difference whatsoever; the only real question is whether or not the distinction is borne out in our confrontation with events, whether we have evidence to support it. We have argued that there is no a posteriori evidence for this distinction. The question then becomes, if not empirical, what is the source of the theist's distinction between essence and existence. We have tried to find an explanation in other beliefs (e.g., creation) and in the psychological experience of the numen, i.e., in an awareness of a different kind of being in which essence and existence are identical. These factors explain, in the absence of empirical evidence for such a contingency in being, the source of the theist's belief. As we said, the mere fact that these sources are religious does not, of itself, make them false; but it does not make them true either--for that they would have to prove their objective validity in the arena of human experience. Our analysis has the advantage of explaining both why the atheist does not accept this radical distinction (he does not see any empirical support for it and lacks the religious beliefs) and why the theist does.

It should be noted, however, that these distinctions are not arguments (unless, of course, they be grounded in experience). One cannot argue to an ontological fact from a linguistic distinction. In the absence of an a posteriori foundation, arguments from finitude to infinitude, from the distinction of essence and existence to their identity, or from contingency to necessity are just so many circles.

Consider for instance the relation between contingency and creation. If essence/existence distinction then creation, but if creation then Creator.

> [Given creation] . . . there is no reason that one should look for another proof of the existence of God. . . . This,

> however, is a theological inference based upon the faith of Christians in the word of God; it is not a philosophical argument. . . . Our argument must therefore assume that the world has always existed.[27]

But if one really assumes that the world has always existed then he returns to the metaphysics of Aristotle in which only a cause of being _this_ (of becoming and of continued being) is required. But perhaps I am here confusing creation in time with eternal causation. I think not. To say that there never was a time when the world was not and yet it is caused, i.e., its being, does not make sense. Eternal causation is unintelligible. It is no wonder that Gilson grants that it is impossible to conceive creation except as a change. Under the hypothesis of eternal creation there is no _event_ which requires a cause, no time A when it was not versus a time B when it is. But cause is applied to alterations, to events. If there was no beginning, then what possible service could a cause perform? What is its effect? What does it explain? The world being here? That needs an explanation only if at one time it was not. But perhaps a more charitable construction may be put on the theist's belief in eternal creation. He argues that God has sustained the world through all eternity, that apart from him there could be no world. But why is it that the world must be sustained? Because it is being-with-nonbeing, but as we argued above the very notion of being-with-nonbeing is tenable only when juxtaposed to pure being and pure non-being, i.e., only when set against the nothingness of the pre-creation void and God--which the atheist does not grant.

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[27] Gilson, _Elements_, p. 68.

To summarize, what I have been suggesting in these last few pages is a complex interrelation between the meanings (only) of Being, Being-with-nonbeing and Non-being. These meanings entail references to each other; but to appreciate the inferences one must be willing to play in that ballpark and the fact is the atheist has his own stadium and wants to play a home game.

I believe that the theist understands creatures to be per aliud in the order of existence because he believes the world to have been created. The non-theist, however, rejects the distinction precisely because he does not believe that the world was created. We arrive then at a point of confrontation, as we did in chapter three. We can however understand the point of view of each. In the absence of empirical evidence the acceptance or rejection of the essence/existence dichotomy is contingent upon belief or disbelief in creation. As we have seen above[28] creation itself is not amenable to rational consideration.

As we proceed it becomes increasingly clear that philosophers, both theist and atheist, are bound by the questions they ask. There can be relative agreement about what responses constitute adequate answers, but on what grounds may one adjudicate the question of questions? To speak of a being as per aliud is to speak of its needing an explanation. To apprehend such a being is to apprehend a question. In the previous chapter we considered many instances of this theistic questing. In our present discussion, however, it is evident that the non-theist does not "instinctively" share the same questions. Gordon Allport has touched on this problem in his interesting book The Individual and His Religion. He writes:

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[28] See above, pp. 81-86.

> Yet is it not also true that unless one is awe-struck at the overpowering structure of the physical and moral universe, one could not feel the cogency of the cosmological argument? . . . Similarly, unless an individual is moved by evidences of intelligence and design in the universe, he would not take the teleological argument as support for his faith, because it would answer no lively questions for him.[29]

For the non-theist the apprehension of a contingent being is also the confrontation of a question, but it is a different question. He sees the caused and asks for its cause, the conditioned and seeks its condition. But his question is in fact that of "What made it what it is?" i.e., a question of its becoming. The theist, as we have seen, pursues a far more ambitious question "What made it to be?" Such a question can never be resolved in terms of other made-to-be beings; ultimately it must seek that being which is not made-to-be. That is to say, if one is to ask the theist's question one cannot help but arrive at the theist's answer. The "explanation" proposed by the atheist is judged inadequate by the theist. Why? Because it is a response to a different question. The atheist posits natural beings as the explanation of other natural beings. This resolution is adequate--but only to the question "Why are they what they are?" It is clearly not adequate to the theist's question "Whence comes their existence?" Natural beings are not adequate explanations of the existential contingency of other natural beings because they are themselves per aliud in the order of existence. It seems to me that if one wishes to refute the theist one must reject not merely the answer, but the question to which that answer is a response.

The theist seeks a "total" explanation. Consider the following exchange from the Russell-Copleston debate:

[29] Gordon W. Allport, The Individual and His Religion (New York, 1950), p. 156.

> Russell: So it all turns on this question of sufficient reason. What do you mean by sufficient reason?
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> Copleston: By sufficient reason in the full sense I mean an explanation adequate for the existence of some particular being.
>
> Russell: But when is an explanation adequate?
>
> Copleston: An adequate explanation must ultimately be a total explanation, to which nothing further can be added.
>
> Russell: Then I can only say that you're looking for something which can't be got, and which one ought not to expect to get. . . . You have to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire to do what you want, and that we can't do.[30]

The theist's question is the most ultimate one that can be formed by the human intellect. It seeks the explanation for the totality of the world. It is, as Heidegger put it, Why is there something rather than nothing?[31] Why should something arise out of the endless sea of nothing? This question is clearly existential; it cannot be understood as, why it becomes _what_ it is; it must be understood as, why _is_ it. This is then the issue to which the theist offers God as a response. But what of the question itself? What leads the theist to raise it?

> Part of metaphysics moves . . . around the question of knowing why anything exists--why matter, or spirit, or God, rather than nothing at all? But the question presupposes that reality fills a void, that beneath Being lies nothingness, that _de jure_ there should be nothing, that we must therefore explain why there is _de facto_ something. And this presupposition is pure illusion . . . a square circle.[32]

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[30] Russell and Copleston, p. 173.

[31] Martin Heidegger, _An Introduction to Metaphysics_, trans. Manheim (New York, 1959), p. 1. "Why are there essents [i.e., existents] rather than nothing?"

[32] Bergson, p. 251.

In seeking the cause of being the theist is presupposing that being is an effect. One need not interpret this as a presupposition of creation in time. Indeed theists often grant that such a presupposition is a tenet of faith and not of reason. The issue is not so much that at one time there was nothing as it is that something (being) must be caused. That in all things not God to be is an effect. Whether this effect had a beginning or is coeval with its cause is an open question. The presupposition is that being is not the natural state of affairs, that it requires an explanation. But on what grounds are we entitled to presuppose a void? Is this a necessary presupposition? I think not. Compare it with the above discussion of motion. We argued there that to require an explanation of motion is to presuppose rest, and vice-versa to require an explanation of rest is to presuppose motion. Here we face a similar issue. If one presupposes a vacuum, then the absence of a vacuum will require explanation; on the other hand if one presupposed a plenum, then it will be the vacuum which must be explained.

I do not propose to argue that the presupposition of the theist is any less acceptable than that of the atheist. Both are, however, presuppositions for which there is no empirical justification. It is in response to these presuppositions that their respective questions arise. To understand either, one must understand that they begin from different premises. One presupposes being, and consequently asks only why it becomes this being rather than that. The other presupposes non-being and asks why being.[33]

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[33] I must confess that this search for the cause of something has always seemed contradictory to me. To presuppose nothing and then to seek the cause of something is to say that something is an effect which requires a cause. But since the cause must precede its effect, something must have preceded something--which is to deny the original assumption of nothing.

The cosmological argument is the theist's response to the question why is there something rather than nothing. Once again Gilson's insight that these demonstrations are so many proofs of creation is germane. The non-theist is unimpressed by the answer because he believes it responsive to a superfluous question. Before the theist can sell his product to the atheist he must demonstrate a need for it. But how is he to do that? How can he demonstrate that being proceeded out of non-being? The theist attempts to do just that by noting the contingency and precariousness of creatures. He reasons that if individual creatures are contingent their totality must itself be contingent (which fallacy we have discussed above). But the problem is that individuals are contingent in this sense only on the supposition of the contingency of being itself. There is here again a circle. One cannot argue from the existential contingency of creatures to that of being in general because individual creatures will not be judged to be existentially per aliud unless the totality of being is per aliud.

Our considerations are constantly returning to the difference in perspective which distinguishes the theist and atheist. In this regard Otto, in a most suggestive passage,[34] refers to Kant's classic observation that "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience."[35] It was Kant's contention that the mind actively structures the chaotic manifold of sensory impressions and hence that it contributes certain aspects of our experience. It might be suggested, and it is only a suggestion, that a similar active intellect underlies the debate between the theist and the atheist. Each is imposing different "categories" on the manifold; each is bringing different questions to it. Which is to say, both are "interpreting" and structuring. Like Maritain, Otto speaks of the awareness of the numinous as an "intuition." It is:

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[34] Otto, p. 113.

[35] Kant, Pure Reason, p. 41.

> A purely a priori category. . . . Not to be "evolved" from any sort of sensible perception. . . . An original and underivable capacity of the mind implanted in "pure reason" independently of all perception. . . . It issues from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension. . . . Not perceptions at all, but particular interpretations . . . intuitively given . . . a sort of predisposition.[36]

Thus we might say of existential "contingency" and "necessity" that "They are themselves not perceptions at all, but particular interpretations and valuations." What is peculiar in the argument of both the theist and the atheist is that they both rely on the same inductive input; that is to say, they both see the same world. But they see it differently. Therein lies the "structuring" of which I speak. It is prior even to induction; it determines the very way we "induct."

There are obviously some difficulties in employing this Kantian tool and applying it to our present problem. One difficulty is that of the non-universality of these religious "categories." The Kantian categories are characteristic of the human intellect and common to all that possess that intellect. In the case of the structure I am suggesting, it is clear that there is no such universality. However, the suggestion has at least one very large advantage. It allows an explanation of the disagreement between the theist and the atheist which need not culminate in the "stupidity" of one or the other. Under this hypothesis each would be explicable. They would differ only

[36] Otto, pp. 112-115.

because they impose different categories on sensory impressions. Furthermore this suggestion would explain why they so often are condemned to "talk past" each other. There is no possibility of communicating an intuition to someone who lacks the category whereby it could be apprehended. As I said, this is just a suggestion and I do not wish to pursue it further. However, it is a fruitful suggestion. I can only suggest it as a possible explanation. As to why one man employs these categories and another those, perhaps, as we noted at the conclusion of Chapter III,[37] this question also must be addressed to the psychologist and the sociologist.

We have been arguing that The cosmological arguments incorporate certain arational presuppositions. By arational I mean beyond either verification or falsification (for example, that the world was created in time). Apart from these presuppositions the arguments are not cogent, hence the proofs can be persuasive only to those who are willing to accept them. As Maritain admits,

> the philosophic proofs of God, let us say in the five ways of St. Thomas, are a development and an unfolding of this natural [intuitive] knowledge. . . . It would be necessary, before proposing philosophic proofs, to be assured that the minds to which one addresses oneself are alive to this primordial intuition of existence, and conscious of the natural knowledge of God involved in this intuition.[38]

Two things are to be noted. First, it is clear (as we have argued above) that given this "primordial intuition" of existential contingency, God is involved; given contingent existence one must infer necessary existence. Second, it is clear that the atheist does not share this primordial intuition, and hence that the proofs which implicitly presuppose it cannot possibly be cogent for him.

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[37] See above, p. 88.

[38] Maritain, Approaches, p. 23.

What, then, is it that is intuited by the theist? Toward what is he "predisposed"? "What is apprehended here in a non-empirical and non-inferential way is the requirement that there should be an ultimate explanation."[39] What is intuited is not so much God as the need of God as an explanation. The inference of God (cause) from an existing thing (effect) is contingent upon the prior intuition that an inference must be made, that the thing requires an explanation, that the particular being itself (and ultimately the series of natural events to which it belongs) is not self-explanatory. Hence we are confronted with a "felt need"; the intuition of which we speak is precisely the awareness of this need--an awareness which is neither rationally nor empirically grounded. As Russell remarks early in his debate with Copleston, "It all turns on this question of sufficient reason."[40] An explanatory system is judged adequate when it is able to respond successfully to the questions put to it. The atheist subscribes to what he believes is a self-explanatory series of natural events. The problem here is that the theist is led to raise one further question, namely, "Where did the system come from?" The atheist sees no need to respond to the theist's question because he lacks an "intuition" of the world as per aliud. It is because the natural systems subscribed to by the atheist are not responsive to this most basic question that the theist does not find them adequate. What constitutes a sufficient explanation is directly related to the question asked. It

[39] Ian Thomas Ramsey, Prospect for Metaphysics (New York, 1961), p. 229.

[40] Russell and Copleston, p. 173.

is my contention that the theist is intuitively led to pose a question which the atheist is not.

We must now conclude our considerations of the premises, "the per aliud implies the per se," and "there exists a per se." We have attempted to disclose the presuppositions which lead the theist to subscribe to these propositions and to reveal the considerations which prevent the atheist from accepting them. Next we will take up the conclusion of the argument, namely, "There exists a per se." For many theists it is an argument in itself.

CHAPTER VI

Preceding chapters have dealt with the cosmological argument, the inference from contingent being to necessary being. In them we have attempted to disclose the presuppositions of the inference and its (alleged) a posteriori foundation in existing contingent things. We must now begin to discuss the conclusion of these arguments--the per se. Why? What is the point of belaboring the obvious? The proofs would seem to stand or fall on the grounds of our preceding considerations. The argument form has been identified; its two premises, "There exists a per aliud" and "If the per aliud then the per se" have been explored; the conclusion must now be apparent. For those who regard these premises as acceptable the conclusion will also be deemed acceptable; for those who do not it will not. What else remains to be said? At least two things. First, the meaning and significance of the conclusion is not immediately apparent. What is the meaning of "per se"? How are we to understand "that which is through itself"? This is doubly important since there is a very real sense in which the per se is both a premise and a conclusion. We have noted in previous chapters that necessity is in some sense presupposed by contingency, that contingency does not make sense apart from necessity. The second and perhaps more important reason for considering the meaning of per se, aside from its presupposed presence in cosmological arguments, is that the per se serves as its own premise in the ontological argument (a consideration of which will form the major part of this chapter) which argues from the idea of a necessary being to existence.

We have followed the theist's argument to the point at which it asserts "There exists a per se." We must now seek to determine what the theist understands when he describes God in this way.

Section I: The per se.

To be contingent, in the sense in which contingency serves as the foundation of the cosmological arguments, is to have being *per aliud*, through another. For the inference to be valid the cause inferred from the effect of being (i.e., from caused being) must be a cause of being. But it cannot be a caused cause of being since in that case it would be a *per aliud*. The argument has precluded an infinite regress of such contingent beings; there must be a first being which is the cause of the being of all other things and which itself is not caused. Consequently, to be "*per se*" is to have *being* in and through oneself just as to be "*per aliud*" is to have being through another. To the question "Whether Essence and Being are the Same in God," St. Thomas responds in the affirmative. "Respondeo dicendum quod Deus non solum est qua essentia, ut ostensum est, sed etiam suum esse."[1] The *De Ente* proof which rises to God from the contingency of creatures (a contingency rooted in and expressed by the fact that the existence of creatures is not part of their essence) concludes to the existence of a being whose essence is its very act of existing. In all things but God the thing and its existence are distinct so that in every substance beside Him the substance itself is other than its being, but it belongs to God alone to be his own being.[2] Summarizing the conclusions of his cosmological proofs for the existence of God St. Thomas writes that it was shown above that there is some being that must be through itself, and this being is God.[3] It is, then, the conclusion of the cosmological argument that there exists a per se, a being which is through itself. This being is called God, "I am Who am."[4] But what does it mean to exist through oneself? Descartes suggests two possible interpretations. It may be understood negatively in which case we mean that God has no cause, or positively in the sense that God is his own cause.[5] Descartes prefers the latter, arguing that "the fact of His existing per se, or having no cause other than Himself, issues, not from nothing, but from the real immensity of His power."[6] But this distinction seems more verbal than real. Any being which exists through itself must be one which exists eternally, but if it exists eternally it requires no cause (since causality has reference only to events, to changes or alterations, and such a being would not be an event). Similarly, that which has no cause, yet is, must be through itself.

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[1] S.T., I, q.3, a.4.

In the past we have spoken of "per aliud" and "contingency" as almost synonymous. To be contingent is to be dependent on another in some way and hence to be per aliud. We must not, however, too readily equate per se and necessary. Necessity, unlike contingency, may be

[2] C.G., I, 52.

[3] Ibid., I, 22.

[4] Exodus 3:14.

[5] Rene Descartes, Selections, ed. Eaton (New York, 1927), p. 169.

[6] Ibid., p. 170.

either per aliud or per se. That is to say, a thing may have a hypothetical necessity (e.g., if the temperature reaches 212° the water will boil, if X=3 then Y=4, etc.) which is clearly per aliud, dependent on something else. This is to be distinguished from necessity per se, in itself. There is a sense in which one might speak of a contingency as necessarily caused by another, but of a necessity as possibly caused by another and possibly not caused by another. Hence, St. Thomas, after noting that every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not,[7] feels that his third proof is not complete until he has demonstrated not just necessity, but per se necessity.

But the question must now arise, necessary in what? What characteristic is it which God has necessarily through himself? When speaking of contingency this question made some sense; then we could ask in what particular quality a thing was through another, in motion, or position, size, or existence. However, in the unique case of God these questions are inappropriate. God is said to be per se in all his characteristics. In fact, even that is not sufficient; rather we should say that God has no characteristics at all in the sense of accidental qualities. God does not have love; he is love.[8] God does not have omniscience; he is omniscience. God does not happen to exist; he is existence. God is described as a self-necessary being, which must be taken to mean: a being for which it is not possible to be and not to be, and this impossibility belongs to God per se, in virtue of his essence.

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[7] S.T., I, q.2, a.3.

[8] See Copleston, p. 46. See also Moses Maimonides, Chap. I, 57, p. 80.

The cosmological arguments conclude from contingent to necessary existence. That is to say, from the premise of per aliud existence they conclude to a per se existence. In this regard it should be noted that there is a certain amount of interpretation present in the conclusion of the cosmological argument as well as in its premises. We noted that the contingency of motion is interpreted as a contingency in existence itself; similarly after an unmoved mover is inferred from moved being it is argued that the unmoved mover must also have existence in itself.[9] The cosmological arguments face a very real problem in this; only the De Ente argument and the third way actually proceed from per aliud existence to per se existence. In all the other Thomistic proofs the per se concluded to is something other than existence, e.g., prime mover, first efficient cause, supreme goodness, purposeful orderer, etc. In these cases an additional argument is needed to demonstrate that that which is self-moved (for example) must also have existence in itself. For instance, in the fourth way, the proper conclusion from gradations found in things is supreme goodness, etc. A separate argument is needed to conclude to supreme being since gradation in being is not evident in things.

The notion of necessary existence is presupposed in the traditional cosmological arguments in that it is entailed by the premise of contingent being. The farther one progresses in an understanding of the cosmological arguments the more one becomes aware of an illusive circularity (not necessarily vicious). The arguments conclude to a necessary being, a per se, but in many ways they start with it also. We noted at the outset of our study that the enterprise of seeking a proof for the existence of God must begin with a notion, however faint and undetermined, of that necessary being whose existence it is trying to prove, i.e., a quid nominis Dei. We must know the nature of the cause before we can select those effects which provide evidence of it. Furthermore, it became apparent as our considerations progressed that the very idea of contingency presupposes a reciprocal idea of necessity; in particular we argued that the conception of contingent being entails that of necessary being. But what then is the point of the proofs? Are they not circular? Is their conclusion anything but their beginning?

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[9] See St. Thomas, C.G., II, 6. Op. cit. above, p. 96.

No, they are not circular, at least not in a vicious sense. The notions, or ideas, are complementary, but there is a definite progression beyond the mere ideas to the assertion that those ideas have a referent. The significance of the a posteriori verification of the "There exists a per aliud" premise lies in the introduction of a new element--namely, existence--into the otherwise hypothetical deduction. Contingency does entail necessity, but given the empirical confirmation of existing contingent things that entailment may be extended to "If existing contingent beings, then existing necessary being." This does not, of course, void the atheist's objections; as we noted above the assertion that an existing thing is existentially per aliud (radically contingent) is not a necessary judgment.

The insight I'm trying to suggest is an awareness of the fact that the cosmological arguments are suspended in a sea of necessary being; to understand them one must have some appreciation for the idea of God from which and to which the argument proceeds. This observation is in no sense new; St. Thomas acknowledges it early in his discussion of proofs for the existence of God:

> Quia ad probandum aliquid esse, necesse est accipere pro media 'quid significet nomen,' non autem 'quod quid est.'. . . unde, demonstrando Deum esse per effectum, accipere possumus pro medio quid significet hoc nomen 'Deus.'[10]

Now God's name is "I am Who am," and the meaning of that name is necessary existence.

In the ontological argument to which we now turn, the notion of necessary existence is expressly stated as a premise. In both arguments there is a progression from the hypothetical assumption of this necessity (in the cosmological argument the assumption is present in the conditional "If per aliud then per se"; in the ontological argument it is a mental reality, the conception of which is assumed) to its existence. Both proofs depend on the possibility of the idea of necessary being and without it there could be no demonstration of the reality of a necessary being. We must now consider the suggestion (which lies at the core of the ontological argument) that the per se is in some sense self-confirming. It is argued by some that given the idea of a necessary per se, a being which is uncaused with respect to its own existence, no a posteriori argument is required to demonstrate its actual existence, i.e., that one can argue to its existence merely from the idea. We face here a different kind of argument for the existence of God, an argument based on the idea of God rather than on any empirical evidence. Both arguments presuppose the idea of a necessary being. The cosmological argument however begins with a hypothetical assumption of "if contingent then necessary" and proceeds to empirically confirm existing contingent beings from which it then infers an existing per se. The ontological argument, on the other hand, expressly posits the notion of a necessary being as its central premise and then proceeds to argue that this assumption cannot be hypothetical. The ontological argument is purely a priori, devoid of any empirical verification, composed solely of necessary propositions whose validity may be confirmed independently of all sensory observation.

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[10] S.T., I, q.2, a.2, ad.2.

There are three possible reactions to this idea. The positivist rejects it as unintelligible; the atheist accepts it as intelligible but fictitious; and some theists accept it as both intelligible and true. This distinction may perhaps be better stated in terms of Russell's separation of names and descriptions. A description attributes certain qualities to a subject, which subject need not necessarily exist. For instance, we can certainly describe a non-existing unicorn. A name, on the other hand, has a referent; it names some existing thing. The positivist is one who refuses to accept the notion of necessary existence even as a description; he regards it as nonsense, as unintelligible, a square circle. The atheist is willing to grant necessary existence as a description, but not as a name. Finally, the theist accepts it both as a description (although not a total description) and as a name.[11]

To consider the positivist first. There is a large school of philosophers who simply refuse to grant the notion of a necessary being, who regard such a concept as nonsense. One finds this point of view reflected in Hume's observation that

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[11] It is the purpose of the ontological argument to demonstrate that the description of God (e.g., a being supremely perfect) must be a name, but not all theists deem it to be a name solely on the basis of the ontological argument.

> Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no Being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. . . . The words, therefore, necessary existence, have no meaning.[12]

Bertrand Russell puts forth a similar criticism in his arguments that the words contingent and necessary are properly applied only to propositions, not to things. "Existence-propositions do not say anything about the actual individual but only about the class or function."[13] Another familiar instance of this view is found in the writings of A. J. Ayer, who concludes that "all utterances about the nature of God are nonsensical";[14] In fact, "the religious utterances of the theist are not genuine propositions at all."[15]

Here we reach an impasse. There seems to be no way in which the theist can effectively argue that the notion of a per se, of a necessary being which exists through itself and is not caused, is a viable one. But if that is the case then it would seem that the debate itself is voided. How can there be a dialogue when the parties refuse to accept a common terminology? There can be no discussion about the existence or non-existence of anything if one party refuses to grant the possibility. But we are not here concerned with these

[12] Hume, Dialogues, pp. 189-190.

[13] Bertrand Russell, "General Propositions and Existence," reprinted in The Many-Faced Argument, eds. Hick and McGill (New York, 1967), p. 225.

[14] Ayer, p. 115.

[15] Ibid., p. 117.

critics (however justified their objections may be) who deny the possibility or intelligibility of a *per se*. We are concerned with coming to an understanding of a *de facto* debate about the existence or non-existence of such a being. *A fortiori* the atheist, if he is to enter into a dialogue, must grant the intelligibility of the notion. He must grant the idea of God if he is to entertain the question of whether or not a God exists.

It is at this point that the ontological argument first comes into play. It is the argument of one variety of theist that, given the idea of God, there can be no question of whether or not God exists. If his opponent does not adopt the positivistic alternative, if he is willing to accept the notion of a necessary being, the question then becomes, Is the notion of God limited to something possessed by the intellect, or does it refer to, or name, some reality beyond the concept possessed by the intellect? The distinction here is between existing only in the intellect and existing both in the intellect and outside it. It is first established that men do possess the idea of such a being.[16] This sort of theist then argues that to possess the notion of God and yet deny that it exists is self-contradictory, that once the notion of God is granted it cannot be denied that God exists in reality. In other words, the atheist is faced with a choice. Either he must refuse the very intelligibility and possibility of the notion of God, or he must in granting it accept its existence. Hartshorne correctly notes in this regard:

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[16] "I find the idea of God in my consciousness." Descartes, *Meditations and Selections from the Principles of Philosophy*, trans. Veitch (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1966), p. 77. (All future references to Descartes will be from the Open Court edition unless it is indicated otherwise.) The fool "understands what he hears [he understands the word 'God' when it is used, hence it is not for him nonsensical], and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist." St. Anselm, *Basic Writings*, trans. Deane (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962), p. 7. (All future references to St. Anselm will be from this Open Court edition unless it is indicated otherwise.)

> The "fool" who denies God's existence thinks he knows what this existence would mean. . . . Against them the argument is valid, to the extent that it forces them (if they are logical) to shift their position from empirical atheism to positivism.[17]

The atheist can no longer maintain, if the ontological argument is successful, that God is in the mind, i.e., is intelligible, but that he has no reality apart from the mind. He is now forced to accept the positivistic alternative we discussed above, namely that the very concept of a necessary being is an impossibility. But, if that be the case, then he cannot participate in the debate. The choice is this: if there is to be a debate, then either atheism is impossible or the ontological argument is unacceptable. But clearly, any atheist who engages in the debate has granted the notion of God. It would seem then that, if the ontological argument is acceptable, he must also grant God. In our next section we will have to address this challenge; we will have to explain how it is possible to speak of God, and yet to deny his existence. We will argue, as does St. Thomas in his objections to the ontological argument, that no difficulty arises in holding that God does not exist.[18] If we fail in this then we must either refuse to become engaged in the debate or concede the theist's conclusion.

[17] Hartshorne, p. 111.

[18] C.G., I, 11.

Section II: The ontological argument in Descartes.

The ontological argument has received many diverse treatments since its discovery by St. Anselm in the eleventh century. Of the many formulations now available we will consider only two, namely those of St. Anselm (1033-1109) and Descartes (1596-1650). We will begin with the classic argument of Descartes which is set forth in the fifth meditation of his Meditations on First Philosophy. After concluding our remarks about Descartes' rather straightforward demonstration we will consider the more subtle ontological argument of St. Anselm.

Descartes' argument is as follows:

1. "It is certain that I . . . find the idea of a God in my consciousness, that is, the idea of a being supremely perfect."
2. "I know with not less clearness and distinctness that an eternal existence pertains to his nature."
3. In every being other than God it is possible "to distinguish between existence and essence," but "existence can no more be separated from the essence of God, than the idea of a mountain from that of a valley."
4. "It is not less impossible to conceive a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is awanting, or who is devoid of a certain perfection, than to conceive a mountain without a valley."
5. "Because I cannot conceive God unless as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from him, and therefore that he really exists."[19]

The proposition to be proved is that God exists; to this end it must be demonstrated from the sole premise of a quid nominis that existence is part of God's nature.[20] First Descartes asserts that he has an idea of God,[21] of "a being supremely perfect." Then, noting that things are generally considered through the essence/existence distinction,[22] he poses the following disjunction. Either existence is distinct from essence in God (as it is in creatures) or it is not. But to conceive God as non-existing would be to conceive him "devoid of a certain perfection." Therefore, it is "impossible to conceive a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is awanting." But why can't God be conceived not to exist? Descartes' answer is, because it is his nature to exist. If our conception does not include existence it is necessarily not a conception of God. We cannot, for instance, conceive of a mountain except it be juxtaposed to a valley. Why? Because a valley is part of, is involved in, the nature of a mountain. When Descartes speaks of the necessity of conceiving God as existing he is not referring to any characteristic of our mind, but rather to an alleged characteristic of the thing thought.[23] God must be conceived to exist because it is his (and his alone) nature to exist. But does it follow from the fact that God must necessarily be conceived as existing that God in fact exists. Anticipating this objection,[24] Descartes responds, "Because I cannot conceive God unless as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from him, and therefore that he really exists."

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[19] Descartes, pp. 77-79.

[20] That, "an eternal existence pertains to his nature." p. 77.

[21] "I no less find the idea of God in my consciousness. . . ." Ibid.

Having presented this classic statement of the ontological argument, let us briefly analyze its logical structure, as we did that of the cosmological argument.[25] Rather than arguing to the existence of God from a quid nominis Dei, together with other premises, one at least of which is a posteriori, the ontological argument argues solely a priori from a name of God.

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[22] "As I have been accustomed in every other matter to distinguish between existence and essence." p. 78.

[23] ". . . the necessity which lies in the thing itself, that is, the necessity of the existence of God." p. 79.

[24] "Though I conceive God as existing, it does not seem to follow on that account that God exists." p. 78.

1. God is "a supremely perfect being," a being possessing all possible perfections.

There follow one or more analytic propositions designed to demonstrate that this quid nominis Dei cannot exist only in the mind, i.e., that it cannot just be a description.

2. It is "impossible to conceive a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is awanting, or who is devoid of a certain perfection."

These arguments are presented to make manifest a contradiction; it is self-contradictory for a "supremely perfect being" to lack any perfection. The argument then concludes to the necessary existence of God. Obviously the demonstration hinges on the particular quid nominis Dei which is selected. It is "a supremely perfect being" which is shown to exist necessarily; it is "a supremely perfect being" which must necessarily be conceived as existing. This analytic argument becomes a proof for the existence of God by doing nothing other than asserting that God is a supremely perfect being, by doing nothing other than accepting "supremely perfect being" as a quid nominis Dei.

Such then is the ontological argument for the existence of God. As it appears in Descartes the formula has not fared well in the laboratory of philosophy. Its publication (like that of St. Anselm's) was met almost immediately with rebuttals.[26] We will now turn to the most cogent objections levelled against the argument;[27] there are four basic criticisms.

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[25] See above, p. 22.

[26] It is interesting to note as does Matson that in both cases the most strenuous objections were voiced by the theists themselves. See Matson, p. 45.

We must ask first, is such an idea in fact possible? Can we conceive "a being supremely perfect"? Guanilo launched this objection against St. Anselm's "that than which nothing greater can be conceived," but it is no less of a criticism of Descartes' argument. "I . . . am as little able to conceive of this being when I hear of it, or to have it in my understanding, as I am to conceive of or understand God himself."[28] Descartes, however, even when this specific objection is raised by his contemporary Caterus[29] simply rests content with his assertion, "I . . . find the idea of God in my consciousness . . . a being supremely perfect." It would seem that we have reached an early impasse. Descartes has the idea of a supremely perfect being; Guanilo, Caterus, and I do not.

But perhaps something more can be said. After all, to conceive and to imagine are two distinct intellectual operations. Perhaps the critics are confusing imagination with conception. It may readily be argued that we cannot imagine (form a mental image of) a supremely perfect being, but does it follow from our inability to construct a mental picture of such a being that we cannot conceive it? In responding to Guanilo's objection St. Anselm argues that the fact that we are able to understand what is said is evidence of our ability to conceive the greatest or most perfect being. "If this being is understood, it is in the understanding."[30] But do we in fact understand what is meant by "a being supremely perfect"? I for one do not. I understand what is meant by a perfect circle, or even (perhaps) what is meant by a perfect man, but what could a perfect being be? In the case of the circle and the man, I possess a concept of their nature, of circularity and manness, and I understand by a perfect circle, or a perfect man, an entity in which that nature is completely realized. But what does it mean to be a perfect being? Due to the ambiguity of "being" there would seem to be at least two possible interpretations. First, it might mean that this being is perfect in the order of quiddity, that it is perfectly what it is. But to be perfect in this way is to realize completely some nature or essence. When we say, for instance, that a circle is perfect we mean that it is perfectly what it is, perfectly circular. But to say that it is perfectly circular we must know what it means to be a circle. If then we are to say that God is perfectly what he is we must first understand what he is; we must know what it means to be God. But such knowledge is expressly precluded in all major religious traditions from the human intellect; God's essence is an eternal mystery to man. (When arguing for the incomprehensibility of God St. Thomas notes that God is said to be most mighty, great and powerful, great in counsel, and incomprehensible in thought.)[31] Before beginning his argument, St. Anselm carefully acknowledges that God's essence is beyond human comprehension. "I do

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[27] I will not here limit myself to post-Cartesian criticisms, but will incorporate also those objections raised against the Anselmian formulation of the argument wherever they are germane.

[28] Gaunilo, "In Behalf of the Fool," in St. Anselm, Basic Writings, p. 148.

[29] See The Ontological Argument, ed. Plantinga (Garden City, New York, 1965), p. 35.

[30] St. Anselm, p. 157.

[31] S.T., I, q.12, a.7. (St. Thomas footnotes this as Jeremiah xxxii. 18, 19, but that appears to be erroneous.)

not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that."[32] St. Thomas objects to the ontological argument for this very reason. "Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition [*God exists*] is not self-evident to us."[33] Therefore, as no man knows *what* God is, perfection in the order of *quiddity* would be incomprehensible. The second possible meaning of "perfect being" refers to the act of existence, to *esse*. It may be suggested that God *is* perfect, that the act of existence is in him completely expressed. There is here no religious reason for believing that God's *esse* may not be known. St. Thomas, for instance, grants that the entire power and majesty of God cannot be known from sensible things. But, because sensible things are effects depending for their existence on the existence of their cause, we can know that God exists.[34] There are two difficulties with this alternative. First, "is" in this sense refers not to *what* a thing is, but *that* it is.[35] It is a judgment which has nothing to do with the whatness of a thing, except that it asserts the exercise of that whatness in some particular individual. But is it possible to form a concept of "thatness" which is not in fact the conception of some whatness? In other words, can the human intellect conceive of pure *thatness*, an existence which is not some *kind* of existence? Second, what would it mean to be perfectly

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[32] St. Anselm, pp. 6-7.

[33] S.T., I, q.2, a.1. Cf. "It is impossible for any created intellect to see the essence of God by its own natural power." (q.12, a.4) and "God cannot be seen in His essence by one who is merely man, except he be separated from this mortal life." (q.12, a.11).

[34] S.T., I, q.12, a.12.

[35] See St. Thomas, S.T., I, q.3, a.4, ad.2.

that it is? Perfection is intelligible only as the realization of some *whatness*, the realization of some essence; it is irrelevant in the consideration of *thatness*. Moreover, if exception be made, if we allow the adjective "perfect" to be applied to the act of existence, to *esse*, we will re-open the Pandora's box of degrees of existence and force subscription to all the presuppositions which we have previously demonstrated to be inherent in that view.[36] Finally, if we understand "perfect" to have reference to God's act of existing we will be begging the question, presupposing the very thing we have set out to demonstrate, namely that God has an act of existing. To conclude, it may be objected against the ontological argument that the idea of "a being supremely perfect" is an impossible one for the human intellect.

The second major objection to the Cartesian formulation of the ontological argument stems from the *quid nominis Dei* itself. Even if it be granted that the idea of a supremely perfect being may be entertained by the human intellect, what evidence do we have (except for the unacceptable testimony of revelation) that that idea is in fact an idea of God, that it really is a *quid nominis Dei*? If, for instance, "perfect being" be taken as a name of God, and if existence be taken as a perfection as it is by some theists, then it will clearly follow that God exists. The objections against treating existence as a perfection are well known (and will be recognized below), but consider the other premise. Why should the atheist grant the *quid nominis Dei*, "perfect being"? Obviously, if existence is to be understood as a perfection, the atheist will not grant that God is a "perfect being."

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[36] See above, pp. 138-155.

Indeed, if to be perfect is to exist, then the atheist will judge God as imperfect as any unicorn, and the smallest lump of clay will in that respect be more perfect than God. St. Thomas, who here seems much more alive to the status of the non-believer than is either Descartes or Anselm, correctly objects against St. Anselm, "Perhaps not everyone who hears this name God understands it to signify something than which nothing greater can be thought [or "most perfect being"]."[37] Even though this objection was originally levelled against St. Anselm's "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" it is equally germane in the case of Descartes' "a being supremely perfect." It is requisite, if the argument is to establish the existence of God, that the name "a being supremely perfect" be accepted as a quid nominis Dei; the argument can have no cogency as a proof for the existence of God for anyone who does not accept it as such. Both Descartes and Anselm must, if they are forcefully to address the non-believer, begin with a quid nominis Dei which is acceptable to all men apart from their religious convictions. Its premises must be open to all just as the empirical foundation of the cosmological argument was (allegedly) universal and apparent to all men. The force of the ontological argument lies, as we have said, in disclosing a logical inconsistency on the part of the atheist who claims to understand God, but who does not understand him to exist. This logical inconsistency is apparent, however, only if he accepts the theist's understanding of God as a "supremely perfect being." The argument must originate in a name of God which is sufficiently innocuous and general for the non-theist to accept. That is why Descartes suggests "perfect being" and St. Anselm

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[37] S.T., I, q.2, a.1, ad.2.

"that than which nothing greater can be conceived." In each case it is assumed that anyone who engages in the debate as to the existence or non-existence of God must admit that he is discussing such a being. If he is arguing about something which is not supremely perfect or not the greatest conceivable, then it is clear that he is not debating the existence of God. Here the critics' objection once again centers on "perfection" or "greatest"; this time, however, it is not a question of the meaning of perfection, but rather of its application to God. The objection may be stated very simply: if existence is understood as a perfection, then the non-believer will not grant that God is a being supremely perfect; in fact, since he does not believe God to exist he can only conclude that he is not a supremely perfect being. On the other hand, if existence is not understood to be a perfection the non-believer may accept "a being supremely perfect" as a quid nominis Dei, but from such a limited notion of God's perfection existence can never be deduced. In short: if by perfect being you mean a being which exists, then the non-theist will not grant that God is a perfect being; but if by perfect being you do not mean a being which exists, then the ontological argument will not work.

But might not this objection that the quid nominis Dei, "a supremely perfect being," is unacceptable to the non-theist be circumvented by simply changing the structure of the ontological argument? Could, for instance, the theist start not with a name of God, but simply with the concept of a supremely perfect being? The argument might then be:

1. Do you possess the concept "perfect being"? (Following Anselm, if the atheist understands the term he possesses it in his intellect.)

2. But to be perfect a being would have to exist since otherwise it would lack a perfection. (Incorporating here the presupposition that existence is a perfection.)
3. Therefore, "perfect being" must exist.
4. Now, a perfect being is what I call "God." If you do not like that name that is all right, but call it what you will; it must exist.

This reformulation has the virtue of overcoming the initial objection to the equation of "perfect being" and "God." It is possible because, as we noted above, the ontological argument really proceeds by proving that existence is part of the concept expressed by that name; the existence of God is a corollary which follows only if one is willing to grant that "a being supremely perfect" is a quid nominis Dei. Here, in this statement of the argument, we are content to demonstrate that existence must be a part of the concept expressed by the name; whether or not this name is a name of God is perhaps a matter of taste.

But in spite of its apparent advantages, this suggested proof must ultimately fail. Why? Because under its assumptions "perfect being" is simply a concept, not a concept of something; i.e., it is not linked at the outset to a subject; it is not predicated; it is no longer said "Thou art. . . ." or "God is. . . ." Apart from the "Thou art" we have only a concept; we have no subject to ~~which~~ that concept is said to refer. Under these conditions the proof can conclude only to the fact that this concept must contain existence (and that only if existence is deemed a predicate). The conclusion will be that "perfect being" must be thought as existing; it will not be that a perfect being exists. For example, if one wishes to argue that a particular unicorn is warm blooded he could not do it this way:

1. "Unicorn" is a "mammal."
2. "Mammal" is "warm-blooded."
3. Therefore "Unicorn" is "warm-blooded."

All this argument demonstrates is that "warm-blooded" must be a part of the concept "unicorn." It does not prove that there is a warm-blooded unicorn. To do that a further premise is required, namely there exists an X, and X is a unicorn. Given this additional premise we may conclude that "X is warm-blooded."

This example is parallel to the argument of the ontological proof. If the argument remains,

1. "Perfect being" has "every perfection."
2. "Existence" is a "perfection."
3. Therefore, "Perfect being" must have "existence."

then there is no proof of God. In fact such an argument, like that concerning the unicorn, remains totally on a conceptual level--even though part of the conception be the concept of existence. The proof cannot move from the concept of existence (whatever that might mean) to the predication of existence in some particular thing unless first "perfect being" is predicated of something. If "perfect being" is predicated of something, then (if existence is a perfection) that thing will necessarily exist. Just as in the case of the unicorn, if anything is a unicorn then it will have all the characteristics of a mammal; among other things it will be warm-blooded.

This criticism may also be developed in terms of the distinction between "connotation" and "denotation." By "connotation" I understand that set of attributes which constitute the meaning of a term. By "denotation" I understand that which the term names or that to which it refers. The statement "God is a supremely perfect being" is purely connotative; it concerns the meaning and significance of the word "God." Now, even if we expressly grant that the word "God" means "a necessarily existing being" we have still not penetrated at all the question of whether or not the word "God" denotes anything, whether there is a God and hence a necessarily existing being. Denotative statements cannot be deduced from connotative statements.

To summarize, the ontological argument can conclude to the existence of God only if it first be granted as it is by some theists that God is a perfect being. But, if existence is taken to be a perfection, then clearly the atheist cannot grant that God is a perfect being, which is to say the atheist will not accept the suggested connotation of "God." If it is argued that "perfect being" must exist whether or not it is called "God" (i.e., that it necessarily denotes), then the atheist responds, "perfect being" must be thought to exist, but the question still remains does "perfect being" refer to or denote anything? In other words the connotation will remain hypothetical; if there is a perfect being, then (given existence as a perfection) it must exist. But what grounds are there for believing that there is a perfect being? First we must establish that there is a perfect being; only after we have done that can we argue that there exists a being with the characteristics we have deduced from the term "perfect being." Unless it be established that this concept may be predicated of something, i.e., that it has a denotation, our discussion will remain merely one of the proper connotation of this particular conception. As with the unicorn, whether that concept is a concept of something will have to be adjudicated on other grounds.

The third major criticism may be stated as follows: Granted that this is an intelligible idea, and granted that it is a quid nominis Dei, what proof do we have that it is not just an empty fiction? We have questioned the viability (indeed the possibility) of the concept "a being supremely perfect"; we have questioned whether "a being supremely perfect" is an acceptable connotation of "God." We must now address the question of whether or not the words "a being supremely perfect" denote anything. These words may not be characterized by the unintelligibility of "a square circle," but may instead have a status like that of "unicorn," i.e., not self-contradictory but nevertheless fictitious. The mere fact that "a being supremely perfect" may be thought and that its connotation includes "necessary existence" is certainly not proof that such a thing in fact exists, anymore than the thought of a unicorn is proof of its existence. "Though I conceive of God as existing, it does not seem to follow on that account that God exists."[38] Why shouldn't we consider the term "God" just as we do "unicorn," intelligible but fictitious? We objected above that so long as it is not proven that "a being supremely perfect" refers to something the argument is ineffective. "Could it not with equal justice be said that I have in my understanding all manner of unreal objects, having absolutely no existence in themselves."[39] It is to this objection that the ontological argument speaks most eloquently. The idea "God" is singularly unlike that of "unicorn"; it cannot be thought apart from existence. Just as in the case of the unicorn if we think anything other than a horse-like figure with a single horn protruding from the center of its forehead we are not in fact thinking of a "unicorn," so too (argues the theist) in the case of God if we think anything to

[38] Descartes, p. 78.

[39] Gaunilo, p. 146.

which existence does not essentially and necessarily pertain we are not in fact thinking of "God." Descartes is arguing that in the happy case of "God" or "a being supremely perfect" the connotation guarantees a denotation. The thought of a unicorn (or of a mountain for that matter) may be vacuous, i.e., lack a denotation, because existence does not pertain to, is not a part of the connotation of, the essence "unicorn." However, in the case of God, "eternal existence pertains to his nature."[40] The distinction between essence and existence may be made in the case of the unicorn or the mountain, but not in the case of God.[41]

This response is acceptable as far as it goes, but it still does not resolve our objection, namely how do we know that such a thing in fact exists? How is it possible to analyze a connotation in such a way as to deduce a denotation? All that has been demonstrated so far is that God must be thought of as existing, that the connotation of "God" includes "existence" (and that only if the definition of God as a supremely perfect being is accepted). But it is one thing to speak of what must necessarily be thought and quite another to speak of what must necessarily be. As Kant has so forcibly argued, "the unconditioned necessity of judgments is not the same as the absolute necessity of things."[42] Granted that everyone should understand by the word "God" a being supremely perfect (or a being than which nothing greater can be conceived), it will not necessarily follow that there

[40] Descartes, p. 77.

[41] "Existence can no more be separated from the essence of God, than the idea of a mountain from that of a valley." Descartes, p. 78.

[42] Kant, Pure Reason, p. 501.

exist in reality something than which nothing greater can be thought, or a being supremely perfect. Just because that which is indicated by the name God is conceived by the mind, it does not follow that God exists save only in the intellect.[43] It must somehow be established that this quid nominis Dei has a referent, not just that it must be thought as existing, but that it does in fact exist as objectively real. "For it should be proved first that this being really exists somewhere; and then, from the fact that it is greater than all, we shall not hesitate to infer that it also subsists in itself."[44] If there is a supremely perfect being, then (assuming existence to be a perfection) existence will necessarily pertain to it. But first it must be established that such a being exists objectively. Until that is accomplished the deduction must necessarily remain hypothetical.

To proceed further, the atheist may grant the proposition "God is a being supremely perfect" (or "God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived") and still not succumb to the force of the argument. As we have noted above,[45] "is" may be used in two ways, as a copula in which case it simply links two concepts, and existentially in which case it asserts that the subject exists (affirming not just that x is y, but that x is). If in the proposition, "God is a being supremely perfect," the "is" is understood merely as a copula then the proof will not be cogent. In that case the argument will be:

1. "God" is "a being supremely perfect."
2. "A being supremely perfect" must include "existence."
3. Therefore "God" must have "existence."

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[43] See C.G., I, 11.

[44] Gaunilo, p. 150.

[45] See above, pp. 125-126.

This simply links the concept "God" with "existence." It does not prove that God exists, but that he must be thought as existing. To make this a proof of God's existence a further proposition must be added:

1. God is.

In the case of the unicorn one must assert that there is a unicorn; otherwise that a unicorn is a mammal and warm-blooded must forever remain hypothetical; i.e., if there is a unicorn, then it is warm-blooded. In the case of the ontological argument the proof cannot get beyond the hypothetical "if" unless it be asserted on other grounds that there is a God. When Descartes argues that a supremely perfect being must be conceived to exist since otherwise it would be devoid of a perfection and consequently not be a being supremely perfect he is confusing the two senses of "is." He should say, a supremely perfect being cannot be conceived not to exist; therefore if "God" is "a supremely perfect being" then "God" must be conceived as "existing." But this is only to say that the concept of God must include "existence"; the question still remains, does that concept have a referent? Having said what he is, quid nominis, it is still to be established that God is, an sit.

Descartes is not totally defenseless against this renewed criticism; twice it was called to his attention and both times he defended his proof with the same argument. The priest Caterus objected:

> Though it may be conceded that an entity of the highest perfection implies existence by its very name, yet it does not follow that that very existence is anything actual in the real world, but merely that the concept of existence is inseparably united with the concept of highest being.[46]

[46] The Ontological Argument, p. 37.

To this challenge Descartes recalled the mechanism whereby a link was forged between thought and reality prior to the formulation of the ontological argument. "All that I clearly and distinctly apprehend to pertain to [an] object, does in truth belong to it."[47] Consequently it was sufficient for Descartes' defense to simply recall this principle in his reply to Caterus.[48]

> My argument . . . was, of the following kind--That which we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature of anything . . . can be truly affirmed *of that thing* [rather than of the concept of that thing].[49]

Subsequently a group of seventeenth century philosophers and theologians drew up a list of criticisms in which they objected:

> The proper conclusion would have been:--*therefore (after we have investigated with sufficient accuracy what God is) we can truly affirm that to exist belongs to God's nature*. Whence it does not follow that God actually exists.[50]

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[47] Descartes, p. 77. Earlier he had concluded, "I may now take as a general rule, that all that is very clearly and distinctly apprehended (conceived) is true." (p. 43)

[48] There is one other way in which the objective existence of "a being supremely perfect" may be established. In the third meditation Descartes provides the following proof: "There must at least be as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect. . . . But among my ideas . . . there is one that represents God. . . . By the name God I understand a substance infinite . . . by which I myself, and every other thing that exists . . . were created. But these properties are so great and excellent that [it is impossible] . . . that the idea I have of them owes its origin to myself alone. And thus it is absolutely necessary to conclude . . . that God exists." (pp. 49-54) It would seem that here there is an empirical premise underlying Descartes' argument. However, with this justification the argument ceases to be *a priori* and becomes instead cosmological. Its argument again moves from the contingent to the necessary, to which it might be objected that the conception of a supremely perfect being is once again dependent upon the presuppositions which support the cosmological argument. Since the limitations of these *a posteriori* demonstrations have already been discussed there is no need to pursue this alternative any further.

[49] *The Ontological Argument*, p. 38. Italics mine.

[50] As quoted in *The Ontological Argument*, p. 41.

Once again Descartes responds:

> In order to derive the conclusion you desire, you should have worded the major premise thus: *that which we clearly understand to belong to the nature of anything, can truthfully be asserted to belong to its nature*. . . . But my major premise was as follows--*that which we clearly understand to belong to the nature of anything can truly be affirmed of that thing*.[51]

We cannot here consider the justification (if any) for Descartes' optimistic epistemology. We need only raise the following question. When he speaks of clearly and distinctly apprehending an idea, precisely what is it that he apprehends? Is it that he has the idea? If so, then the apprehension of the idea of God is no different from that of the idea of a unicorn since he has both. Is it rather that he clearly and distinctly apprehends *what* it is, i.e., that he apprehends its essence? If it is the latter then surely we apprehend the idea or essence of a unicorn far more clearly and distinctly than that of God. There is only one other alternative; rather than clearly and distinctly understanding *what* God is perhaps Descartes means to suggest that he clearly and distinctly understands *that* God is. But before turning to a consideration of this alternative (which will constitute the fourth and final objection to the Cartesian argument) we may summarize the third objection as follows. Considerations of the connotation of "a being supremely perfect" are irrelevant in a proof for the existence of God unless it first be established that there is "a being supremely perfect." As Schopenhauer has said:

> All depends upon the source whence you have derived your conception: if it be taken from experience, all well and good, for in this case its object exists and needs no further proof; if, on the contrary, it has been hatched in your own

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[51] As quoted in *The Ontological Argument*, p. 42.

sinciput, all its predicates are of no avail, for it is a mere phantasm.[52]

The fourth objection has to do with the claim that to understand God is to understand that he exists. We suggested that this is perhaps the claim that Descartes wishes to make when he writes that he has a clear and distinct idea of God. Thus he notes at the outset that "an eternal existence pertains" to God's nature, that "existence [cannot] . . . be separated from the essence of God," that "it is impossible to conceive of a God . . . to whom existence is awanting," and finally that he "cannot conceive God unless as existing." The point Descartes is here making is perhaps a difficult one to grasp. It is not merely that "God" is "existence," i.e., that the name God connotes existence; he is maintaining rather that that God exists is part of his idea of God. To understand "God" is to understand that it has a denotation, that it refers to an existing being. Descartes is not arguing that existence is part of what God is, such that if we are to understand what God is we must understand him as existing. Rather he is arguing that to understand God is to understand that he is. Under the first interpretation it makes sense to present a hypothetical proposition, "If there is a being supremely perfect then it exists." Under the second interpretation it does not make sense at all because the concept includes that God is, or that a supremely perfect being is. Only in this unique case of God is thatness included in whatness. That God is, is part of the idea of God which Descartes has clearly and distinctly apprehended. If this thesis is acceptable, namely that that God exists is part of the idea of God, then the third criticism which argued that there was no link between the thought and the reality, between the connotation and its denotation, would be overcome.

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[52] As quoted in The Ontological Argument, p. 67.

The fact is, however, that this thesis is not tenable; objective existence is not part of any idea. The first to take exception to this aspect of Descartes' argument was P. Gassendi, a well-known contemporary. Gassendi objected:

> Existence is a perfection neither in God nor in anything else; it is rather that in the absence of which there is no perfection. . . . Hence neither is existence held to exist in a thing in the way perfections do, nor if the thing lacks existence is it said to be imperfect (or deprived of a perfection), so much as to be nothing.[53]

Descartes' only reply was, "Here I do not see to what class of reality you wish to assign existence, nor do I see why it may not be said to be a property as well as omnipotence."[54] This criticism, originally made by Gassendi, has been developed so decisively by Immanuel Kant that we cannot do better than simply to quote his observations:

> "Being" is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing.
>
> The real contains no more than the merely possible. A hundred real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers.
>
> For the object, as it actually exists, is not analytically contained in my concept, but is added to my concept . . . synthetically.
>
> By whatever and however many predicates we may think a thing--even if we completely determine it--we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that this thing is. Otherwise, it would not be exactly the same thing that exists.

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[53] As quoted in The Ontological Argument, pp. 45-46.

[54] As quoted in The Ontological Argument, p. 48.

> Whatever, therefore, and however much, our concept of an object may contain, we must go outside it, if we are to ascribe existence to the object.[55]

The point is simply that existence does not pertain to the concept of anything. Existence is a matter of "quodity" (if it is permissible to coin a word in a dead language), not quiddity; it is not the what of a thing, but the that of it. Kant is here expressing the Aristotelian distinction between what and that.

> If definition can prove what is the essential nature of a thing, can it also prove that it exists? . . . Definition does not prove that the thing defined exists. . . . For definitions do not carry a further guarantee that the thing defined can exist.[56]

Thus, far from it being "impossible to conceive a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is wanting," it is instead impossible to form a conception of God in which existence is included. That is not to say that God necessarily does not exist; to say that would be to slip into the very fallacy we are criticising. From the fact that God cannot be conceived as existing it does not follow that he does not exist anymore than from the (alleged) fact that he must be conceived as existing it follows that he does exist. Existence is simply not relevant to conceptions. Furthermore, from the fact that existence is not a predicate (that it adds nothing to the conception of a thing), it follows that to think of God as non-existing is not to think of him "devoid of a certain perfection." The concept of God is no more perfect (or great) when thought as existing than when not, anymore than the concept of one hundred real thalers is more perfect than that of one hundred possible thalers. As Matson has noted in his excellent book The Existence of God, the trouble with saying that the concept of being will be more perfect or greater if it is understood to include existence is that it is equivalent to saying that "a supremely perfect being" or "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" denoting something is greater or more perfect that "a supremely perfect being" or "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" not denoting something which "does not appear to have any intelligible meaning."[57]

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[55] Kant, Pure Reason, pp. 504-506. Cf. David Hume, Treatise, Bk. I, Pt. II, sec. 6. "To reflect on anything simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other. That idea when conjoined with the idea of any object, makes no addition to it."

[56] Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, II, 92b7-25.

The ontological arguments for the existence of God proceed deductively from a quid nominis Dei; since the argument seeks to conclude to existence, existence must somehow be incorporated into the name of God. Consequently, the ontological argument must begin by inviting its opponents to share in that apprehension of the nature of God in which his existence may be discovered. If it can be shown that God has existence essentially, that existence is part of his nature, then it will (allegedly) follow that he in fact exists. The argument consequently begins with a name of God such as "a being supremely perfect" or "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." These are indeed well chosen names, since from them it would seem that almost anything at all might be deduced. Hence from "a being supremely perfect" one might argue to God's infinity on the grounds that a thing is more perfect (or greater) if infinite than if finite.[58] What is particularly interesting here is that, as it turns out, not quite everything can in fact be deduced from such general terms. We noted that for the purposes of the ontological argument existence must be deduced, but can it be? Can existence be deduced from the concept of God? It would seem that existence might be drawn out of a concept, only if it can first be included in one. The crux of the Kantian critique is that existence can never be a part of any concept, that the concept of an existing desk is no different than that of a non-existing desk. Even then with such general terms as "most perfect being" or "greatest being" the proofs must ultimately fail. Such blanket terms allow the deduction of any possible quality, but since existence is not a quality, not a predicate, they can never succeed in providing grounds for its deduction.

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[57] Matson, p. 52.

[58] This argument would, of course, seem strange to Parmenides and other pre-Socratics who judged finitude superior to infinitude, but then it is rather difficult to be specific about the requirements for perfection or greatness.

If one were to assume, contrary to fact, that existence could be a part of any concept then the ontological argument would be in danger of begging the question--a charge which Gassendi forcefully made against Descartes.

> In enumerating the perfections of God, you ought not to have put existence among them, in order to draw the conclusion that God exists, unless you wanted to beg the question. . . . You affirm what has to be proved, you assume your conclusion as a premise.[59]

The only sense in which the ontological argument is able to avoid a vicious circularity is in its claim to move from what God is to that God is, but if that God is is taken as a premise (as it is when Descartes asserts that he clearly and distinctly perceives that God must exist) then the question is begged. We return here to the second objection; if by a being supremely perfect you understand a being which necessarily exists the atheist will not grant that God is such a being.

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[59] As quoted in The Ontological Argument, pp. 46-47.

To conclude, if it is Descartes' contention that God must necessarily exist because he clearly and distinctly perceives Him as existing, then perhaps the ontological argument is no more than the "sleight-of-hand trick" that Schopenhauer said it was, "a charming joke."[60] First because the conclusion of factual existence cannot be incorporated in any a priori premises, and second because if (exception be made and) it be granted that existence can be part of the non-empirical premises then the argument will be begging the question.

Section III: The ontological argument in Anselm.

Given the above objections to the Cartesian formulation of the ontological argument for the existence of God, does the Anselmian argument differ so that it is able to fare better? St. Anselm's proof is stated somewhat differently than is that of Descartes, but the form and logical structure are basically the same. St. Anselm argues:

1. "We believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived."
2. It is one thing for an object to exist in the intellect and another for it to exist separately.
3. "Even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived."

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[60] As quoted in The Ontological Argument, p. 66.

4. "And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone; then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater."

5. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.[61]

The similarity of this argument to that of Descartes is apparent. Indeed, after quoting the Anselmian proof as it appears in St. Thomas, Caterus could only remark, "But now, kindly tell me is not this M. Descartes' own proof?"[62] Descartes selects "a being supremely perfect" as his quid nominis Dei; Anselm selects "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." One characterizes God as "most perfect," the other as "greatest." St. Anselm argues, as does Descartes, that non-existence is incompatible with this name of God, that if that than which nothing greater can be conceived does not exist then it is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Both incorporate the fallacy of regarding existence as a predicate. Both argue from the fact that the name of God entails existence that God must in fact exist. For Descartes, existence is a perfection without which God could not be "a being supremely perfect"; for Anselm, existence is greater than non-existence and if God is to be "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" he must be conceived as existing.

What then distinguishes St. Anselm's ontological argument from that of Descartes? It is distinguished first of all by its purpose. Here we take our cue for interpreting Anselm's proof from the suggestion he makes in the preface of the Monologium, "I believe that one will be much helped in understanding the matter of this book, if he has taken note of the intention, and the method according to which it is discussed."[63] Descartes sets his proof within the general quest for "a firm and abiding superstructure in the sciences."[64] To which end he proceeds, "by casting aside all that admits of the slightest doubt," vowing to "continue always in this track until I shall find something that is certain."[65] In short, Descartes seeks that knowledge which is absolutely certain; his remarks are addressed to the inner necessity of pure reason and inner experience. St. Anselm, on the other hand, is not addressing pure reason and inner experience; he is responding to a request made by the monks of the monastery of Bec in Normandy whose abbot he was. "Certain brothern have often and earnestly entreated me [to write down a] . . . meditation on the Being of God."[66] St. Anselm's brothers asked that in this meditation "nothing in scripture should be urged on the authority of scripture itself"; rather they desired "the conclusion of independent investigation . . . briefly enforced by the cogency of reason."[67] Anselm's response to this request was a brief treatise originally entitled "An Example of Meditation of the Rationality of Faith" later called the "Monologium." But after completing his initial response, which was evidently quite successful,[68] Anselm writes, "I began to ask myself whether there might be found a single argument which would require no other for its proof than itself alone; and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists."[69] It is in response to this question that he wrote the sequel originally entitled "Faith Seeking Understanding" which was later to be known as "Proslogium." It is here that we find the celebrated ontological argument for the existence of God.

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[61] St. Anselm, pp. 7-8. There is more to the Anselmian argument. We will take up its statement in Proslogium III below. See below, pp. 206-211.

[62] As quoted in The Ontological Argument, p. 36.

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[63] St. Anselm, p. 37.

[64] Descartes, p. 21.

[65] Ibid., p. 29.

[66] St. Anselm, p. 35. Since the Proslogium grew directly out of the Monologium I see no reason to suppose that the general intent and method of the former treatise is any different from that of the latter.

[67] Ibid.

St. Anselm's method is that of rational inquiry; the Monologium proceeds by "the cogency of reason" to "whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true." Similarly the Proslogium seeks a single rational argument which would alone be sufficient. But sufficient for what? Again, what is the intention of Anselm's work? In each case Anselm intends a "meditation on the Being of God." His method will be that of unaided reason, but his intention is the illumination of the Christian faith. "Give me . . . to understand that thou art as we believe."[70] In what sense then is his method rational? In the sense that he will not defend scripture by scripture, but will instead provide a rational commentary on the tenets of faith. "The Monologium and the Proslogium seek to establish by necessary reasons--rationes necessariae--and not by the testimony of scripture, all that a Christian believes. . . ."[71] This is why the original title of the Proslogium is so revealing; it is "Faith Seeking Understanding." Faith is a given. Similarly, the "Meditation on the Rationality of Faith" asks not for a proof of faith, but an understanding of it. Anselm's prayer is "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."[72] Anselm will address that unbelief not through scripture, but through reason, but he will do it in the context of belief. "For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. . . . Unless I believed, I should not understand."[73]

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[68] Anselm notes that the monks "making copies for their own use, condemned this writing to long remembrance." (p. 36)

[69] St. Anselm, p. 1.

[70] Ibid., p. 7. Cf. p. 2. "I have written the following treatise, in the person of one who strives to lift his mind to the contemplation of God, and seeks to understand what he believes."

What is it which St. Anselm believes? What is the faith which stands under his understanding? When he petitions, "Give me . . . to understand that thou art as we believe,"[74] what is the belief from which he proceeds? "We believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived."[75] It is precisely the predication of this quid nominis Dei which is done on faith. St. Anselm's "proof" is in fact an explanation of this belief, a commentary on its meaning. Given this faith, the rest relies on reason, on the rational analysis of God's name. Apart from all the difficulties inherent in Anselm's analysis of "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" (in particular his claim that it must be conceived as existing) there remains this ultimate hiatus which no rational inquiry can bridge. It is the gap between "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" and "*Thou art* that than which nothing greater can be conceived." They are linked only by faith, by the "Thou art." Never is this *belief* questioned. St. Anselm does not ask, *is* God that than which nothing greater can be conceived, i.e., is this a *quid nominis Dei*? He asks, what does it mean to be that than which nothing greater can be conceived? Thus when he speaks of the questions of his monks he writes, "This they ask, not for the sake of attaining to faith by means of reason, but that they may be gladdened by understanding and meditating on those things which they believe."[76] To possess the revelation of God, and yet not seek to understand it, is almost beyond comprehension, "to my mind it appears a neglect if, after we are established in the faith, we do not seek to understand what we believe."[77] His meditation asks, How are we believers to understand what we already know. Thus when thanking God for his illumination, St. Anselm gives thanks that he has come to understand *what* God is.

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[71] Paul Vignaux, Philosophy of the Middle Ages, trans. E. C. Hall (Cleveland, 1959), p. 36.

[72] Mark, IX: 24.

[73] St. Anselm, p. 7.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

> Thou didst seek God. Thou hast found him to be a being which is the highest of all beings, a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.[78]

One cannot properly say that he asks whether this name of God has a referent, whether it denotes something, or whether God in fact exists. Rather the meditation makes it apparent that this is a "stupid question," a question which cannot be asked. To believe that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived and yet to ask, "But does he exist?" is like the question, "Yes, it is a circle, but is it round?"

[76] St. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, *Basic Writings*, p. 178.

[77] *Ibid*., p. 179.

[78] St. Anselm, p. 20.

The question of God's existence is raised only by the fool "since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."[79] But in what sense is this doubter a fool? Is it that he does not believe? No, in not believing he is to be pitied, not ridiculed. To be a fool is to be lacking in understanding, not in faith. It is not foolish to say, There is no God; it is foolish to question God's existence (argues St. Anselm) only if one believes that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. He is a fool only if he accepts the faith, and yet entertains the question of God's existence. It is noteworthy that when confronted with the criticism of Guanilo that "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" cannot be conceived, St. Anselm begins his response with the provision that it not be understood as a response to one who does not believe, but rather to a believer,[80] and then argues against Guanilo's objection solely on the grounds of his Catholic faith. "But I call on your faith and conscience to attest that this is most false."[81]

It may be objected that when St. Anselm states his intention to argue to "the conclusion of independent investigation . . . briefly enforced by the cogency of reason," that he is undertaking an enterprise not essentially different from that of Descartes, i.e., an attempt to defend the faith with pure unaided reason. But the question is, in what sense is reason independent and unaided. Is it independent in its presuppositions, or in its treatment of those suppositions? Two considerations lead me to believe that it is the latter. First, in the Proslogium St. Anselm specifically establishes faith as the foundation of the treatise. "For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand."[82] Second, in the Monologium he speaks of the independent investigations of reason in the context of independence from scriptural authority, "nothing in scripture should be urged on the authority of scripture itself."[83] St. Anselm's commitment is not to reason, but to a rational faith; he seeks a rational understanding of his beliefs, not a rational defense of them. Both Anselm and Descartes begin by retreating to the inner recesses of their minds; both produce "meditations." "Enter the inner chamber of thy mind, shut out all thoughts save that of God . . . close thy door and seek him."[84] Descartes withdraws into his mind only to recoup and purify his intellectual forces so that he may once more do battle with the external world, but, unlike Descartes, Anselm remains within his mind.

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[79] Ibid., p. 7.

[80] "I think it sufficient that I answer the catholic." St. Anselm, p. 153. See F. C. Copleston, Medieval Philosophy (New York, 1961), p. 45.

[81] St. Anselm, p. 154.

Nor must we overlook the fact that St. Anselm's "argument" is enclosed within a prayer. Indeed, some have even suggested[85] that the prayer is the most important and revealing aspect of the entire meditation. One notices first of all that the proof begins with the prayer "Look upon us, Lord; hear us, enlighten us, reveal thyself to us. . . . Thou dost invite us; do thou help us."[86] Then, after the formal statement of the argument, Anselm once again raises a prayer to God; this time it is not a prayer of petition but one of thanks:

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[82] Ibid., p. 7.

[83] Ibid., p. 39.

[84] Ibid., p. 3.

[85] See Anselm Stolz, "Anselm's Theology in the Proslogion," in Many-Faced Argument, p. 188.

[86] St. Anselm, pp. 5-6.

> I thank thee, gracious Lord, I thank thee; because what I formerly believed by thy bounty, I now so understand by thine illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that thou dost exist, I should not be able not to understand this to be true.[87]

The understanding of God's being, of what God is, that has grown out of the original faith that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived is such that now no rational doubt is possible.

Clearly, St. Anselm is not by any stretch of the imagination subordinating faith to reason; he is not proving the faith--he is explaining it. One might even say he is exercising it. When he writes "unless I believed, I should not understand,"[88] he means just that. "For Anselm man cannot seek if God does not teach him, nor find if God does not manifest himself."[89] I believe (says Anselm) that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived; I must therefore also believe that he exists. Or rather, to believe that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived is to believe that he exists. St. Anselm does not seek a proof for God's existence in the Proslogium, ontological or otherwise;[90] he seeks merely to understand his faith.[91] His argument is not like that of Descartes which purports to move from a thought to God--God is never absent.

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[87] Ibid., p. 10.

[88] Ibid., p. 7.

[89] Vignaux, p. 40.

[90] Stolz, p. 183.

[91] See John Baille, Our Knowledge of God (New York, 1959), pp. 134, 137.

But, having suggested that St. Anselm is not seeking a proof or demonstration in the sense of the Cartesian argument, it would seem that we are contradicting St. Anselm himself. After all, it is St. Anselm who writes, "I began to ask myself whether there might be a single argument which . . . would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists."[92] And it is St. Anselm who concludes, "*Hence*, there is no doubt that there exists a being. . . ."[93] and "To thee alone, *therefore*, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings."[94] What further evidence is needed to substantiate the contention that these chapters of the *Proslogium* do, in fact, present an *argument*, or *proof*, for the existence of God? But there are some difficulties with this interpretation, some important passages which are not compatible with it. There is first the suggested title of the essay; St. Anselm did not propose "*Fides quaerens argumentum*," but "*Fides quaerens intellectum*," not faith seeking proof or demonstration, but faith seeking understanding or comprehension. Moreover, when we read that St. Anselm seeks "a single argument" there is no indication whatsoever that he does so because his faith is in jeopardy. There is no suggestion that, in the absence of such an argument, St. Anselm will cease to be a believer. That never seems to be the issue. Furthermore, how are we to understand his own statement of his purpose, "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand." Clearly, we must investigate St. Anselm's understanding of "argument." Does he understand

[92] St. Anselm, p. 1.

[93] *Ibid*., p. 8. Italics mine.

[94] *Ibid*., p. 9. Italics mine.

argument as the attempt to convince someone of the truth of a belief to which he does not subscribe? to make someone believe what he has previously disbelieved? It seems to me that he does not. "I come not for this purpose to have you remove doubts from my faith, but to have you show me the reason for my confidence."[95] True, St. Anselm's discussion does issue in a proof of God's existence, but that is not its intent. "I do not seek to understand that I may believe." The intention is not to demonstrate that God exists,[96] but to seek "to understand that thou art as we believe," and in coming to understand "that than which nothing greater can be conceived," we come also to understand that God must be understood as existing, that he exists so truly that he "cannot be conceived not to exist." Far from being designed to demonstrate a belief to one who does not share it, St. Anselm's discussion explicitly states that it proceeds from faith. "Unless I believed, I should not understand." Faith is a necessary condition of this argument--not a consequence of it. The "argument" is not that God exists, that is not for a moment in question, but that anyone who understands what God is, any believer who knows God as that than which nothing greater can be conceived, must necessarily understand him to exist.

In my opinion St. Anselm's discussion of God's existence is far superior to that of Descartes because he understands (and explicitly admits) that it follows upon faith. If taken solely as a rational demonstration the ontological argument must surely fail. The strength of Anselm's formulation is that he does not conceive it as an argument at all (if by argument one understands the attempt to make someone believe what he previously disbelieved), but rather as a meditation, a reflection on (or analysis of) God's revelation. His brethern believe in God; it is Anselm's task to address their unbelief. If, then, they question whether or not the God in whom they truly believe exists St. Anselm will help them recognize that God's existence is part of their belief.

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[95] St. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo, Basic Writings, p. 238.

[96] Cf. Cur Deus Homo, p. 178. "not for the sake of attaining to faith by means of reason."

What is it, then, which distinguishes this argument of St. Anselm from that of Descartes? It is not a persuasive argument directed against the non-believer; it is a reflection on the shared Christian faith of believers. As such it does not hope to address the non-theist who does not know what God is, who does not believe that he is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. These "works that necessarily begin with a datum of faith are written for believers: the prior speaks to his Benedictines."[97] As such it is able to escape many of the criticisms which we previously leveled against the Cartesian formulation. For instance, we had objected that the non-theist is one who does not believe God to be a perfect being, if by "perfect being" it is understood that such a being exists. In the case of St. Anselm's argument there is no need for a defense of this quid nominis Dei; it is taken on faith, "We believe that thou art. . . ." How do we know that God is really named "that than which a greater cannot be conceived"? As Karl Barth has argued, St. Anselm does anticipate Descartes' mistake. "Anselm did not regard this designation for God . . . as a constituent part of a universal awareness of God, but as an article of faith."[98] "We know it because that is how God has revealed himself and because we believe him as he has revealed himself."[99] Descartes' mistake was in believing that the name of God could be established rationally, intellectually demonstrated in the absence of faith; St. Anselm does not make that mistake. Furthermore, we objected that Descartes can validly argue only to the necessity of conceiving a being supremely perfect as an existing being, that the argument's proper conclusion is not that God necessarily exists but that he must necessarily be thought as existing. But such a criticism seems inappropriate in the case of St. Anselm since he does not seek a proof of God's objective, extra-mental, existence. Indeed, it is Stolz's conclusion that "There is no trace of a proof of God's existence."[100] The proper (and intended) conclusion of St. Anselm's Proslogium is that the God whom believers believe to be that than which nothing greater can be conceived must be conceived as existing.

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[97] Vignaux, p. 44.

The argument is completed in the awareness that God's existence is so certain that "it cannot be conceived not to exist."[101] It is not simply that the fool is inconsistent, that he is questioning the circularity of circles, but that in suggesting the non-existence of God he is suggesting an impossibility--a square circle. To say that God must be conceived as existing is to say that non-existence is incompatible with his nature. But to say that God cannot be conceived not to exist is to say that the question of his non-existence cannot even be entertained. On the one hand it is said that it is possible to conceive God as existing and (for certain reasons) we should so conceive him. On the other it is argued that it is not possible not to conceive God as existing. First it was argued (by hypothesis) that it is possible to think of God either as existing or as not existing and that to be conceived as existing is the greater of the two possibilities. Now it is made evident that in fact the hypothesis was unacceptable; there is no possibility of conceiving God as non-existent; God "cannot be conceived not to exist." But how then is it that the atheist can deny God's existence. And why does St. Thomas write that no difficulty arises in holding that God does not exist.[102] In one way it is possible; in another it is not. "In one sense, an object is conceived, when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood."[103] In the former sense one knows the word, but does not know that to which the word refers, i.e., what it connotes; in the latter sense the word and that to which it refers are both understood. The atheist is one who knows the word, but does not understand what it means. It is possible for him to conceive God as non-existent. But the theist, he who understands that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot deny God's existence; if he did he would indeed be a fool.

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[98] Karl Barth, Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. Ian W. Robertson (Richmond, Virginia, 1960), pp. 76-77.

[99] Ibid., p. 152.

[100] Stolz, p. 203.

[101] St. Anselm, p. 8.

[102] C.G., I, 11.

[103] St. Anselm, pp. 9-10.

St. Anselm has begun in faith; "Anselm writes his Proslogium as a believing Christian."[104] He concludes with a deeper and more profound appreciation of that faith, with the recognition that his faith includes a belief in God's existence.

> And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.[105]

The argument here is a reductio ad absurdum; it purports to demonstrate that the supposition of a non-existent God is incompatible with the quid nominis Dei which all Christians must accept on faith. "No one who understands what God is can conceive that God does not exist."[106] The cogency of a reductio is dependent upon the certainty of the proposition to which it is juxtaposed. But here that proposition is consciously acknowledged to be a tenet of faith--not of reason. The fool believes, he knows God's name, but he does not understand what it means. He is a fool because he is inconsistent; he questions what he says he knows. To know God and yet question his existence is no different than knowing circles and questioning their roundness. The non-theist, on the other hand, is one who does not believe that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived--and because he does not believe he does not understand. Understanding is here firmly rooted in faith. It is the understanding which discovers the ultimate significance of faith, which discloses that _faith_ in what God is is also, at the same time, _faith_ that he is. St. Anselm's whole argument is simply that anyone who understands what God is, who is a believer, must necessarily believe him to exist.

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[104] Stolz, p. 188. Cf. Copleston, p. 43. "Anselm thus speaks as a believing Christian, and he stresses the primacy of faith; but he sets out to understand with his reason the data of faith." Cf. also Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), I, p. 278. "Anselm is first a believer, then a theologian . . . his reason devotes itself to the elucidation of his faith."

[105] St. Anselm, p. 8.

[106] Ibid., p. 10. Italics mine.

But even this argument is not without its weaknesses. It still depends in part on treating existence as a predicate; it still argues that God thought as existing is greater than God thought as not existing. Hence the Kantian objection still holds. We cannot deny that the argument, even when it is understood as we have suggested (when addressed to the fool rather than to the atheist and when explicitly grounded in faith), presupposes that existence is a perfection. In the context of this limited goal it is, perhaps, possible to see how the argument might have been formulated. If instead of attempting to deduce God's existence from "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" St. Anselm had instead selected a _quid nominis Dei_ which explicitly includes, or states, existence then the presupposition of existence as a perfection would not have been required for the deduction and the conclusion would have been a legitimate one. Thus the argument could have moved from "I am Who am," or God is that being whose essence it is to exist. Descartes suggested, "I can conceive no other being, except God, to whose essence existence pertains"[107] and "existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than the idea of a mountain from that of a valley."[108] Of course, these names obviously beg the question.

[107] Descartes, p. 80.

[108] _Ibid._, p. 78.

But this objection is relevant only when we cling to the notion that these chapters of the Proslogium form an argument, that there is a progression. Our thesis is that they constitute a reflection on the revelation of faith, that they are a coming to know better and better what the believer already knows in part.

Much recent attention has focused on the suggestion that there are two distinct ontological arguments in St. Anselm's Proslogium. Malcolm maintains, in his much-quoted article "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," that the first argument (Chapter 2) concludes to the necessity of attributing existence to God on the grounds that whatever does not exist is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. The second argument (Chapter 3) goes further and concludes to necessary existence, arguing that that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot be conceived to exist contingently since it is greater to exist necessarily. Malcolm summarizes his thesis:

> His first ontological proof uses the principle that a thing is greater if it exists than if it does not exist. His second proof employs the different principle that a thing is greater if it necessarily exists than if it does not necessarily exist.[109]

But how does this distinction affect the controversy? It raises the question as to whether or not the Kantian criticism that existence is not a predicate is also applicable to the contention that necessary existence is a predicate. "Although it is an error to regard existence as a property of things that have contingent existence, it does not follow that it is an error to regard necessary existence as a property of God."[110] Under this interpretation it becomes apparent that Anselm has succeeded in deducing necessary existence from the concept of God understood as that than which nothing greater can be conceived. The conclusion of the first form of the argument is that God must be conceived as existing rather than as not existing. Nothing is said as to the mode of that existence. Hence Kant can criticize the argument on the grounds that the conclusion, "God exists," follows from the premise, "God is a supremely perfect being," only if such a supremely perfect being exists. In other words, there is no impossibility in denying the conclusion so long as a denial of the premise remains possible. But the ramifications of the second formulation are such that it is clearly impossible to deny the premise since God's existence is a necessary existence.

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[109] Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," in Many-Faced Argument, p. 306.

[110] Ibid., p. 311.

It would seem that the only effective rebuttal against this second formulation is the assertion that "necessary existence" is an impossibility, that it is self-contradictory. Hume, developing this attack against such an a priori proof, argues:

> There is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or prove it by any arguments a priori. Nothing is demonstrable unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no Being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction.[111]

Kant echoes this objection, noting that every reasonable person must grant that "all existential propositions are synthetic."[112] This criticism, the contention that existential propositions are not necessary, is the core of most modern attacks on the argument in

[111] Hume, Dialogues, p. 189.

[112] Kant, Pure Reason, p. 504.

Chapter 3 of the Proslogium. Lecturing on "The Existence of God" in 1951 Professor J. J. C. Smart rejected any attempt to deduce the existence of God from the mere concept of his nature. "There can never be any logical contradiction in denying that God exists." Why? Because "Existence is not a property."

> The fundamental mistake in the ontological argument, then, is that it treats "exists" in "an infinitely perfect being exists" as if it ascribed a property existence to an infinitely perfect being. . . . The verb "to exist" in "an infinitely perfect being exists" does not ascribe a property to something already conceived of as existing but says that the concept of an infinitely perfect being applies to something.[113]

To make this objection even more succinct we quote I. M. Crombie's essay on "Theology and Falsification."

> For all existential statements are contingent . . . it is never true that we can involve ourselves in a breach of the laws of logic by merely denying of something that it exists. We cannot therefore in this sense contrast the contingent existence of the world with the necessary existence of God.[114]

Indeed, this modern view that all existential propositions are contingent forms the pivot of J. N. Findlay's essay "Can God's Existence be Disproved?" in which Findlay progresses through an insightful and even sympathetic consideration of the object of religious worship (in which he suggests that an adequate religious object is one characterized by "unsurpassable supremacy"[115]) to the conclusion that God's qualities must be possessed in a necessary manner.[116] Given this characterization of divine qualities, Findlay then argues that those qualities themselves constitute a disproof of God's existence.

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[113] J. J. C. Smart, "The Existence of God," in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, eds. Flew and MacIntyre (London, 1955), p. 34.

[114] I. M. Crombie, "Theology and Falsification," (arising from the University Discussion) in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, p. 114.

[115] J. N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence be Disproved?" in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, p. 51.

> Plainly, (for all who share a contemporary outlook), the [necessary qualities] entail not only that there isn't a God, but that the Divine Existence is either senseless or impossible.[117]

Of course, the entire criticism hinges on the "contemporary outlook"[118] and would be significant only to those who share its perspective. Findlay elaborates his conception of the "contemporary outlook" as follows:

> Those who believe in necessary truths which aren't merely tautological, think that such truths merely connect the possible instances of various characteristics with each other: they don't expect such truths to tell them whether there will be instances of any characteristics.[119]

The issue ultimately becomes one of logical necessity versus logical impossibility. Anti-ontological arguments have been fashioned by critics such as J. N. Findlay on the grounds that God's existence must be either necessary or impossible, and since necessary existence is self-contradictory, it follows that God (necessary existence) is an impossibility. Noting this Malcolm confesses, "I do not know how to demonstrate that the concept of God--that is, of a being greater than which cannot be conceived--is not self-contradictory."[120] Why

[116] Ibid. See p. 53.

[117] Ibid., p. 54.

[118] It is obviously such an "outlook" that Crombie subscribes to when he declares that "All existential statements are contingent."

[119] Findlay, p. 54.

[120] Malcolm, p. 318.

not? Because nothing is truly self-contradictory. The notion of self-contradictoriness is bound to a particular domain of meanings. A square circle is self-contradictory only in that language in which square is contrary to circle. What I am trying to suggest is that we have returned to the conclusion of Chapter V; we are faced with opposing metaphysical systems, one in which the notion of necessary existence is self-contradictory since (in this system) all existence is understood to be contingent and another in which the term necessary existence is perfectly intelligible. Malcolm is quite right in his suspicion "that the argument can be thoroughly understood only by one who has a view of that human [contingent] 'form of life' that gives rise to the idea of an infinitely great being."[121] But this is no different than what we found in discussing the cosmological arguments. The proof is cogent only within a given metaphysical system apart from which it cannot even be understood.

Findlay concludes by arguing that since, in the contemporary view of the matter, the necessity of propositions is merely a function of our language, "the Divine Existence could only be a necessary matter if we had made up our minds to speak theistically _whatever the empirical circumstances might turn out to be_."[122] In Findlay's opinion such a myopic view "wouldn't suffice for the full-blooded worshipper."[123] In this I cannot help but disagree. It is his contention that such a way of looking at things is not compatible with the theist's natural tendency to find "our actual world anything but edifying."[124] We have seen time and again in our past considerations that the theist is precisely one who sees the natural world (with all its limitations) as edifying. Findlay is not entirely clear as to exactly where the conflict lies. It seems to stem from the fact that God's existence can be necessary "on modern views, only . . . where truth reflects an arbitrary convention,"[125] but that at the same time the theist wants this truth to "make a real difference" which is not compatible with its being merely an arbitrary convention. But this incompatibility arises (as Findlay himself notes) only "on modern views"; there is no apparent incompatibility if that framework is not adopted.

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[121] _Ibid._, p. 320.

[122] Findlay, p. 54.

[123] _Ibid._

Once again we have disclosed two rival metaphysical systems, two competitive logics. One in which all existence is understood to be contingent, and another in which all existence with one important exception (God) is contingent. It is simply not legitimate to reject the one simply because it does not fulfill the presuppositions of the other. When Ryle dismisses the ontological argument from necessary existence on the grounds that "Any assertion of the existence of something . . . can be denied without logical absurdity,"[126] he is simply exposing his own metaphysical presuppositions. The objection can have no impact on those metaphysical systems in which the idea of a necessary being (God) is deemed admissible.

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[124] *Ibid.*

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

[126] *The Nature of Metaphysics*, ed. D. F. Pears (New York, 1957), p. 150.

My own view is that if one wishes to adjudicate between these two rival metaphysics one can render a judgment only in terms of their adequacy as explanatory systems. After all, metaphysical frameworks are tools with which we confront, and attempt to make intelligible, reality. The question should be, does the system which posits a necessary being explain anything which cannot be explained without that postulate, i.e., assuming that all existence is contingent? Such a determination will, of course, depend upon your estimate of exactly what has to be explained. But here we return again to the conclusion of Chapter 3 in which it was noted that the theist and non-theist have different estimates of what needs explanation. If an infinite series of contingent beings is deemed an impossibility so that there must be a first being which is not itself caused, then clearly a necessary being will have to be incorporated into the explanatory system. If not, then (applying Ockham's razor) a metaphysics in which all existence is understood to be contingent is tenable.

Where, then, does the ontological argument leave the atheist? Evidently we must conclude with Malcolm, "I can imagine an atheist going through the argument, becoming convinced of its validity, acutely defending it against objections, yet remaining an atheist."[127] Why? Because validity has to do with the relation between a set of premises and the conclusion drawn from those premises. The atheist is free to reject the premises, to reject what the theist accepts on faith (namely that God is a being supremely perfect or that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived).

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[127] Malcolm, p. 320.

The ontological argument is an excellent example of the thesis we previously urged in connection with the cosmological arguments. The traditional proofs for the existence of God are expressions of a particular Weltanschaaung, a particular way of structuring reality. We have argued that the proofs incorporate presuppositions which are not acceptable to the non-theist. In the case of the ontological argument the role played by faith, by what we have called arational premises, becomes even more apparent. To understand these arguments properly we must view them within the context of God's revelation. And since that revelation is not apparent to all men it must not surprise us to find that the proofs which rest on it are not cogent for all men.

CHAPTER VII

Before setting out the problems to be addressed in this final chapter let us briefly review the conclusions we have defended. After exploring the inference, "If the per aliud then the per se," which is the major premise of the cosmological argument, we maintained that the claim that the consequent follows necessarily on the antecedent is acceptable only if one is willing to assume certain presuppositions. Among those presuppositions we listed the impossibility of an infinite regress and that the world was created (either in time or not), which is to say that the universe as a whole requires a cause.

Following our discussion of this inference and its presuppositions we turned our attention to the minor premise, "There exists a per aliud." We sought first to express the profundity of this contingency, that beings are to be understood as per aliud in the order of existence. Then we suggested that the recognition of this existential dependency was itself dependent upon some prior conditions. Among them we included the supposition of an explanatory system (metaphysics) in which the being (esse) of a thing is accidental to its essence, which admits the term "necessary," and in which certain characteristics of beings (motion, order of efficient causes, etc.) are deemed to require an explanation. We further objected that the arguments are responsive to a question which is not clearly required, namely, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Most importantly we argued that the verification of this premise could not possibly be a posteriori.

Moreover, we suggested that the judgment of existential contingency is meaningful only on the supposition (a priori) of a metaphysical system in which "necessary existence" is meaningful and that this radical contingency could be felt psychologically only after the prior experience of what Otto calls the "numen."

We then took up the ontological argument and tried to suggest that its proper interpretation was the Anselmian one of "Fides quaerens intellectum." We maintained that the argument clearly presupposes faith, that it is in fact a reflection designed to make manifest that God is what he is believed to be.

After each of these criticisms I carefully pointed out that they were not to be construed as arguments designed to demonstrate the unacceptability of the theist's proofs, but rather as critical explorations aimed at achieving a more adequate appreciation of the arguments for the existence of God by disclosing the presuppositions upon which they rest. Our intention throughout this study has been to make manifest the reasons why these arguments, which many theists find cogent, are not cogent from the viewpoint of the atheist. We have worked to demonstrate not that the proofs are erroneous, but that they cannot be persuasive to the non-theist who does not share the presuppositions upon which those arguments rest. It is possible to interpret our entire inquiry as an extended commentary on Maritain's statement that:

> The philosophic proofs for the existence of God . . . are a development and an unfolding of this natural knowledge. . . . And they normally presuppose his natural knowledge . . . it would be necessary, before proposing philosophic proofs, to be assured that the minds to which one addresses oneself are alive to this primordial intuition of existence, and conscious of the natural knowledge of God involved in this intuition.[1]

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[1] Maritain, Approaches, p. 23.

We have suggested a statement of the theist's argument and tried to elucidate precisely what is involved in that "natural knowledge" or "primordial intuition" which is presupposed by his demonstration. I believe that we may find our answer to the question, "Why is it that traditional theistic demonstrations of the existence of God fail to convince the atheist, but at the same time seem conclusive to many theists?" in the appeal those arguments make to this "Primordial intuition." It seems to me that the proofs are in fact reflections on, or an unfolding of,[2] this basic intuition. Because this intuition is not shared by non-theists the proofs are not acceptable to them. We then set out to suggest wherein the "natural knowledge" of the atheist differs so that he is not able to appreciate the theist's proofs.

Two questions remain to be addressed. First, is there a middle ground between theism and atheism? Second, if not, are there any considerations besides those we have presented which can aid us in the selection of one alternative rather than the other?

Section I: Agnosticism.

Given the above conclusions it may seem that, far from arguing for theism or atheism, we have instead unwittingly made a case for agnosticism. Our discussion has concluded, as did that of David Hume, "All religious systems[3] . . . are subject to great and insuperable difficulties. . . . All of them, on the whole, prepare a complete

[2] I have in mind here the type of reflection we found operative in St. Anselm's Proslogium.

[3] We will argue below that "religious systems" should be understood to include both theism and atheism. See below, p. 237.

triumph for the skeptic."[4] Given this melancholy result how can we avoid subscribing to Hume's conclusion that "A total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable resource."[5] After reaching equally negative conclusions as to the evidence of theism, J. S. Mill also urges a judicious suspension of judgment:

> From the result of the preceding examination of the evidences of theism . . . it follows that the rational attitude of a thinking mind toward the supernatural, whether in natural or revealed religion, is that of skepticism as distinguished from belief on the one hand, and from atheism on the other.[6]

But how are we to understand such a skepticism? What does it mean to suspend judgment in these matters? Is it really an alternative? There would seem to be two possible interpretations of this refusal, one positive, one neutral. By a neutral skepticism I have in mind that refusal to reach a decision, to resolve the choice, which may be viewed as a "middle of the road," intermediate, position, neither theistic nor atheistic. On the other hand, by a positive skepticism I understand that agnosticism which is more than just a refusal to choose, which is in fact a choice, a belief. The neutral skepticism is concerned with a rational resolution of the problem of God's existence; the positive skepticism concerns not a knowledge about God but a belief about God. The former proposes that we can rationally choose neither, the latter that we should believe neither. We will begin with a consideration of that agnosticism which is the intellectual suspension of judgment.

[4] Hume, Dialogues, p. 186.

[5] Ibid., p. 187.

[6] Mill, Theism, p. 77.

After arguing as the main point of this study that neither the existence nor the non-existence of God can be rationally demonstrated (except on the acceptance of certain arational presuppositions) it might seem that the next logical move would be toward some intermediate position such as a neutral agnosticism. I wish, on the contrary, to argue that that agnosticism which may be characterized as maintaining that knowledge either pro or con in these matters is impossible does not provide a viable alternative, that in fact it is not even a mediate position.[7] Agnosticism is not an alternative to theism and atheism because its propositions are concerned with a totally different inquiry. The propositions asserted by atheism and theism (i.e., there is or is not a God) are ontological; they make a claim about the world. The propositions of agnosticism (i.e., it is impossible to know whether or not there is a God) are epistemological; they concern the state of our knowledge.[8] Agnosticism could not possibly offer an alternative to the disjunction theism or atheism. Considered epistemologically (from the standpoint of knowledge) there is no real difference among the three; each properly expressed would have to grant that there can be no proof or disproof of the existence of God apart from identifiable presuppositions (which are not themselves rationally defensible), e.g., that the universe is caused or not caused. From the perspective of knowledge there is not even a distinction between theism and atheism; each when truly self-conscious (when made aware of its presuppositions) grants that its arguments are influenced by faith, i.e., that they are expressions of, not defenses of, faith. Consequently, the proper statement of both the theist and the atheist is not "I know," but "I believe." From which it clearly follows that agnosticism could not possibly be an alternative, an intermediate position.

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[7] One may find an excellent example of this mistake in John Hick, Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963), p. 4.

[8] The word "agnostic" was originally coined by Thomas Huxley. It is said that after being asked many times whether or not he believed in God Huxley hit upon the word as a way to characterize his skepticism. He simply employed the negation of the Greek word for knowledge by which he meant to suggest that he did not know whether or not there is a God.

Now consider the three ontologically, as making statements about reality. Clearly there is a great difference between theism and atheism when the positions are viewed ontologically. Theism makes a positive claim about the reality of God; atheism makes a negative one. However, agnosticism, which Paul Carus insightfully characterizes as "a bankruptcy of thought,"[9] is characterized precisely by the fact that it makes no claim at all about the reality or non-reality of God. It follows, then, that here too (as when viewed epistemologically) agnosticism which makes no claim at all cannot be an alternative; it is not an ontological position.

If, however, one chooses to understand by agnosticism not a statement about the absence of knowledge, but rather about the absence of belief, then the arguments we have just presented will not be adequate. The above objections were directed against that agnosticism which argues that no knowledge is possible in these matters. We pointed out that both theists and atheists may accept this criticism--but they nevertheless commit themselves to a religious stance. The alternative statement of agnosticism to which we now turn contends that it is possible, indeed mandatory, in the absence of knowledge, to suspend judgment, to make no commitment. We argued that the first expression of agnosticism was compatible with both theism and atheism; clearly the second is not. We must, then, consider that agnosticism which purports to be not just a judicious suspension of intellectual judgment, but of belief--what we have referred to as a positive agnosticism. Here it might be the claim of the skeptic that "I do not believe (as opposed to know) that God exists, nor do I believe that he does not exist."

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[9] Paul Carus, God: An Enquiry and a Solution (LaSalle, Illinois, 1943), p. 4.

The question here is one of alternatives; are there two alternatives or three? Consider, for example, the choice of a pipe. Assume we have narrowed the selection down to a Canadian stem and a saddle stem and we can choose only one. What are the alternatives open to us? Would we be correct in saying there are only two choices? No, a third alternative remains; we can choose to buy no pipe at all. Is the case of the agnostic similar? Is the scope of possible choices limited to two--theism and atheism? Or is there an alternative? Can we choose not to choose? In the case of the selection of the pipe the disjunction (either Canadian or saddle stem) is hypothetical, i.e., if I am to choose then. . . . But are all choices hypothetical? Do we have in all decisions a double choice; first to act, then how to act? I think not. Consider the choice "Sink or swim." It is clear that in this case, at least, to refuse to choose is to choose to sink. It is, as Kierkegaard has said, "Either/or;" no abstentions allowed. In the case of "Sink or swim," one will sink if he does not choose to swim. And he will sink no less if he simply decides not to swim than if he decides (positively) to sink. Now, theists have long maintained that the choice, "Belief or disbelief," is like that of "Sink or swim." Jesus says, "He that is not with me is against me."[10] And we read in Revelation, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."[11] In my opinion it would be a mistake to dismiss this as just so much religious rhetoric. The point is that if the truth lies in God it will be lost no less by not deciding for it than by actively deciding against it.[12] "_For to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a . . . decision,--just like deciding yes or no,--and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth_."[13]

Just as in the case of neutral agnosticism, this positive skepticism offers no alternative position.[14] The refusal to choose is itself equivalent to one of the members of the disjunction. Here it is yes or no, and "maybe" means no. Consequently, "There is no question of _whether_ we 'ought so to wager our lives'. . . . _How_ we are to wager them is the only question open to further inquiry."[15] As Pascal says, "You must bet. There is no option; you have embarked on the business."[16] But the problem is, our "further inquiry," our search for reasons has led to a dead-end. We must choose, but how? We must now consider whether, since reason seems unable to resolve our dilemma, there are any other factors that may be invoked to aid us in our choice.

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[10] Matthew, 12:30. See also Luke, 11:23.

[11] Revelation, 3:16.

[12] So, too, if the truth does not lie in God.

[13] William James, "Will to Believe" in _The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy_ (New York, 1956), p. 11. See also p. 26.

[14] But how are we, then, to explain the man who says he believes neither? So far as I can see, the only viable explanation is that he has not penetrated to an awareness of his true beliefs and instead rests content with a shallow vacuum, a refusal to discover his ultimate convictions. Why this timid escape? Perhaps it is a failure of nerve, a cowardly refusal to accept the responsibility of his own belief.

[15] Bendall and Ferre, p. 207.

Section II: Pragmatic arguments.

If we are correct in our contention that a suspension of belief is impossible, that it is in fact a cowardly refusal to penetrate to one's ultimate commitments, are we not thrust back into the dichotomy between theism and atheism? Clearly we are. Once again we find ourselves on the plane of this belief versus that belief, of this group of presuppositions versus that group. Is there any way to circumvent this dilemma? There is one further argument which must be considered. It finds expression in Pascal's "wager" and in James' "will to believe." These are not properly arguments designed to prove or disprove the existence of God; rather, they are constructed to argue for this belief rather than that belief. They are not for or against God's existence so much as for or against the viability of belief in God. They are persuasive arguments designed to suggest reasons for (or advantages in) holding one set of beliefs rather than another.

Pascal argues:

> "Either God is, or He is not." But which side shall we take? Reason can decide nothing here. [Precisely what we have been arguing.]. . . . A game is on . . . and the coin will fall heads or tails. Which will you gamble on? According to reason you cannot gamble on either; according to reason you cannot defend either choice. . . . [It is objected], "The man who calls heads and the man who calls tails have made the same mistake. They are

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[16] Blaise Pascal, The Pensees, trans. J. M. Cohen (Baltimore, 1961), p. 157.

> both wrong; the proper thing is not to bet at all." [To which Pascal responds], Yes, but you must bet. There is no option; you have embarked on the business.[17]

Note how Pascal's development of the problem parallels our own. He presents the dilemma, "Either God is, or He is not"; he argues that this disjunction cannot be mediated on the grounds of reason; and finally he makes it clear that even though reason cannot guide us in our choice, still a choice must be made. Having set forth a problem which is precisely the problem before us he argues:

> Which will you choose, then? . . . Since you must necessarily choose, it is no more unreasonable to make one choice than the other. That is one point cleared up. But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and loss in calling heads, that God exists. Let us estimate the two chances; if you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing. Do not hesitate, then; gamble on His existence.[18]

Both belief that God exists and belief that he does not are (to use James' term) "overbeliefs"--they are commitments which exceed the limits of rational justification. But, if that is the case, and if we must overextend ourselves in this matter, why not extend our credibility in the direction of the greatest advantage?

What are we to say of this argument? In a sense it is very much to the point. We have argued that reasons for God's existence presuppose prior beliefs, i.e., the assumption of propositions which are not rationally defensible. But at that point we are stymied; we can go no further. It would seem that Pascal has found a way of going further; he is here giving us reasons for choosing one set of beliefs rather than another. But is he really? Is he in fact giving us reasons in support of theistic beliefs?

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[17] _Ibid._, pp. 156-157.

[18] _Ibid._, p. 157.

Pascal's argument is basically, "It is a good bet to believe in God, therefore you should believe in God." Consider this suggestion more carefully, "It is better to believe this, so you should believe this." The question is, Can the non-theist believe that? Can a man believe what he should believe? The atheist may well agree with Pascal's argument and yet say, "Yes, you're right. It is better, easier, and more advantageous to believe in God, but I can't." Pascal is aware of this objection and formulates it as follows:

> Yes, But my hands are tied and my mouth is gagged. I am forced to play, and I am not free. Something holds me back, for I am so made that I cannot believe.[19]

Unfortunately, to the non-believer's agony Pascal can only recommend that he behave as if he believed, that he find faith "by taking holy water, by having masses said, etc."[20] But of course this is precisely what the atheist is unable to do. "But that is just what I am afraid of."[21] To this Pascal responds again with the wager. "What have you to lose?"[22] Had the dialogue continued the non-believer may well have replied, "My self-respect."

Matson makes this point very well (i.e., the impossibility of believing what you should believe) by quoting Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass:

> "I can't believe that!" said Alice.
> "Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."
> Alice laughed. "There is no use trying," she said: "one can't believe impossible things."

[19] Ibid., p. 158.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

> "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."[23]

The command, "Believe this," is simply impossible; the atheist (if he is honest) cannot come to believe in God by an act of the will--no matter how much he might want to and no matter how advantageous such a belief might be. There is a stubbornness about belief which is immune to reason. To twist Paley to our own purposes:

> There is a great deal of difference between taking medicine and the medicine getting into the constitution. It is one thing to assent to a proposition of this sort; another, and very different thing, to have properly imbibed its influence.[24]

One may even arrive at an intellectual resolution and still withhold assent. Thus the doubter, having no such solution, can truly say, "I can't believe." I am reminded here of an article written by Max Black which purportedly grew out of a discussion with A. J. Ayer on "The Identity of Indiscernibles." After destroying what he presents as Ayer's position he concludes with Ayer saying, "All the same I am not convinced." Black closes the discussion with, "Well, then, you ought to be."[25] I cannot help but wonder what Ayer is to do. He ought to be convinced, but he is not. Should he do as Carroll's queen would suggest, draw a long breath and shut his eyes? Such is precisely the position of the non-believer when confronted with Pascal's wager. To say he ought to believe (no matter how reasonable and advantageous such a belief may be), when he does not, is absurd. It is to

[23] Matson, p. 200.

[24] Paley, p. 83.

[25] Max Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles," in Charles A. Baylis, Metaphysics (New York, 1965), p. 77.

misconceive belief as a voluntary act of the will.[26] "No command to believe and no will to believe can create faith."[27]

One might well imagine a father living in the midst of Hitler's Third Reich telling his son, "It is better if you believe that Hitler is good; it will be easier for you; it is less dangerous," etc. But this admonition could be cogent for the son only if he subscribed to the belief that it is better to believe whatever is expedient, what is safer. The first will be accepted only on the condition of the prior acceptance of the second. But if the son does not accept the second, how will the father convince him of it? I can see no way, unless it can be subsumed under some still more ultimate maxim, but then what of the defense of that? In short, I am trying to suggest that there is an ultimateness about some beliefs such that they cannot be mediated by reason.

Consider the following analogy, an analogy between what we have been referring to as religious beliefs and what Hume (for instance) referred to as ethical "sentiments."

> When you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it.[28]
>
> This sentiment is not consequent on any reasoning process, "A passion [sentiment] is an original existence."[29]

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[26] As Buber so perceptively notes, "No prescription can lead us to the meeting [with the eternal Thou]." I and Thou, p. 111.

[27] Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York, 1958), p. 38.

[28] David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature (Oxford, 1888), Bk. III, Part 1, sec. 1, p. 469.

[29] Ibid., Bk. II, Part 3, sec. 3, p. 415.

> A given, "so rooted in our constitution and temper that . . . 'tis impossible to extirpate and destroy."[30]

Hume's conclusion from all this was that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions."[31] If one will accept religious beliefs as sentiments or "passions" then it seems to me it makes some sense to say with Hume that our religious discourse is the servant of our sentiments.

There is one more sense in which I would like to invite a consideration of the impossibility of believing what one wants to, or ought to, believe. This aesthetic analogy has been developed by Rudolph Otto who suggests that the perception of God is like that of a painting.

> There is a precisely parallel process in another department of judgment, that of aesthetic taste . . . . which must come from an obscure *a priori* conception of beauty already present, else it would not occur at all.[32]

How are we to respond if we are confronted by a Jackson Pollock *aficionado* who recommends to us, as we view one of Pollock's paintings, "It is beautiful! You ought to like it. If you really understood art you'd agree." Would not that be a strange thing to say? Wouldn't we want to respond, "Obviously, my friend, you don't know anything about the appreciation of beauty; it cannot be willed. You should have said, 'I find it beautiful; it's a pity you do not.'" It is no different in the matter of religious belief. Religious sentiments can no more be stimulated by such recommendations than can artistic.

But after it has been said that faith is not a voluntary act and after the above analogies have been weighed, the question still remains, what is faith? In our discussion I mean no more by "faith" than the assent to the truth of one or more propositions in the absence of intellectually compelling reasons, i.e., without intellectually seeing it as true. The believer is one who assents in the absence of knowledge, in the absence of a recognized grounding for the truth of the proposition. It must be granted that the above definition of faith is an impoverished one; both theists and atheists would wish to maintain that it is richer, more profound, than we have indicated. For instance, Tillich is quite succinct in his dismissal of this interpretation of faith. "The most ordinary misinterpretation of faith is to consider it an act of knowledge that has a low degree of evidence."[33] This more profound understanding considers faith an ineffable experience, completely transcending any possible expression. It is seen in Otto's surrendering of oneself to the "other," in Buber's confrontation of the "Thou," and in Tillich's total surrender to the subject of total concern. In this sense, faith includes, and perhaps is the product of, an act of the will, a voluntary submission. To act in a certain manner is volitional. We have no quarrel with this interpretation of faith, and in other contexts we would accept it readily; but it is not the faith which underlies the theist's proof for the existence of God. Indeed, on this interpretation of faith proofs are superfluous since there is a direct experience. Moreover, this experience is ineffable, beyond comprehension in propositions. We are concerned, on the other hand, with that faith which is an assent (in the absence of reasons) to certain identifiable propositions, e.g., that the universe is caused. To say one ought to believe this, for whatever reason, presupposes that one is free to choose. We have argued, on the contrary, that this intellectual assent is not voluntary, not an act of the will.

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[30] *Ibid*., Bk. III, Part 1, sec. 2, p. 474.

[31] *Ibid*., Bk. II, Part 3, sec. 3, p. 415.

[32] Otto, p. 144.

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[33] Dynamics, p. 31.

Our second objection to Pascal's wager may be stated as follows: Under what conditions does it make sense to say, "You should believe in God--it's a good bet"? If you do in fact believe in God then the prescription would be superfluous. That is to say, if a man believes in God, then to say he should believe in God does not make sense. The only condition under which "You should believe in God" makes any sense is disbelief.[34] It is only the non-believer who can properly be told that he should believe. Matson presents an excellent treatment of this dilemma. Consider (he says) the analogy of parents discussing whether or not it is a good thing for their children to believe in Santa Claus. Since the belief tends to make the children happy and since there are no obvious disadvantages stemming from it, they conclude that it would be a good thing to encourage the belief in Santa Claus. But what if the children should overhear their discussion? What then? Matson reasons that the parents may still be able to convince their children that it is a good thing to believe in Santa Claus (they might argue, for instance, that since Santa is only generous to the boys and girls who believe in him, it would be a "good bet" to believe, reasoning that if they are wrong they lose nothing, but if they are right they gain the gifts), but will they then believe in him? Matson thinks not:

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[34] This might be interpreted to mean: "You should continue your belief in God." In that case it is the possibility of disbelief that is presupposed.

> It is just that believing in Santa Claus, and believing that it is good to believe in Santa Claus, are quite different, and to convince someone that it is a good thing to believe in Santa Claus, and that this reason is the only one for believing in Santa Claus, is an infallible way of getting him not to believe in Santa Claus.[35]

Why? Although Matson does not suggest it, I believe the reason may be found in our present contention. The only condition under which it is possible to believe that one should believe in Santa Claus is the absence of that belief.

We turn now to our final objection. If one were to grant the impossible, if one were to admit that it is possible to believe what one wants to believe, would not that prostitute the faith of both the theist and the atheist? No longer would the believer exclaim, "Credo quia absurdum," but rather, "Credo quia expeditum." Consider the case of the theist. What would be said of the Russian theist, who when facing his local communist party and making application for a job said, "No, it is false those rumors you have heard about me. I am not a believer." Clearly it will be easier for him if he gives up the faith. Realizing that the odds have changed (to use Pascal's expression) wouldn't he be wiser to gamble on God's non-existence? But that could mean two things. It may mean that he should lie, tell them he does not believe when in fact he does. (One might here imagine a parallel case in which an atheist stands before the inquisition and lies, saying he believes when in fact he does not.) But this misses the point. Pascal's wager concerns belief, not the expression of belief (i.e., the confession of faith). He is not saying it is better to confess belief in God, even if you do not believe. He is saying it is better to believe.

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[35] Matson, p. 185.

So to make the example a proper one we will have to imagine our enterprising (apologies to Marx and Lenin) Russian changing his belief. That is, when confronted by the committee he does not just lie, but instead he actually changes his belief; he comes to realize that it is better to believe the expedient--and he then believes that there is no God. What are we to say of this? Would it not be said that he never really believed; that if he really had believed in God he could not have renounced that belief--for any reason? To believe because . . . is to prostitute the faith. Whoever believes in God because does not believe in God; he believes in some other, higher, principle (perhaps the expedient) from which a belief in God is derived. Consequently, to say that you should believe in God is in fact to say precisely the opposite, namely that you should believe in something else, which something else is a reason for belief in God. In short, the statement, "You should believe this," is in fact only an abbreviation of "Because of so-and-so, you should believe this." But we are engaging in a discussion of ultimates, of that principle which is above all others; there is no more ultimate maxim under which our positions (theism and atheism) may be mediated. Or, to put it another way, if one were to say "You should believe X because of Y," we could be assured that X could not possibly refer to God.

Perhaps this objection may become more apparent if we briefly consider the argument of William James which has come to be known as "The will to believe." In many ways it is similar to Pascal's wager. James argues:

> 1. Ideas . . . become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience.[36]

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[36] William James, Pragmatism (Cleveland, 1955), p. 49.

> The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief . . . for definite, assignable reasons.[37]

2. If theological ideas prove to have value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much.[38]

> On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily . . . it is true.[39]
>
> The only test of probable truth is what works best. . . . If theological ideas should do this, if the notion of God, in particular, should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence?[40]

3. Well, the use of the Absolute is proved by the whole course of men's religious history.[41]

Note that belief becomes belief because; the hypothesis of God is true "for pragmatism" or "on pragmatic principles." There is, however, a sense in which James goes beyond Pascal. We said in our discussion of Pascal's argument that to defend the truth of his assertion that one should believe in God because it is advantageous to do so, it would first have to be argued that those beliefs which are expedient are true. That is precisely what James sets out to defend; it is the core of his pragmatic philosophy. "The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences."[42] There is no need for us to go into James' defense of his pragmatic theory of truth. So far as I can see, even if it is granted, the argument will remain open to the objections we have previously launched against Pascal. (I.e., first, belief is not voluntary; second, to say one ought to believe presupposes that one does not believe; third, to "believe because" is to prostitute faith.) Instead, by way of making clear our final objection (that "belief because" would not be "belief in God"), allow me to quote from some of James' correspondence.

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[37] Ibid., p. 59.

[38] Ibid., p. 57.

[39] Ibid., p. 192.

[40] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[41] Ibid., p. 177.

[42] Ibid., p. 42.

On March 30, 1897, John Jay Chapman wrote the following to James:

> [Speaking of "the will to believe"], This is a somewhat roundabout way of saying that such a man hasn't got faith at all. The faith you begin to talk about has been so justified and bolstered, and drugged up and down, and ironed and wired. . . . Damned if I call that faith![43]

To which James responded on April 5:

> Faith indeed! Damme [sic] if I call that faith either. It is only calculated for the sickly hotbed atmosphere of the philosophic-positivistically enlightened scientific classroom. . . . All this rubbish is only for public purposes. In my individual heart I fully believe my faith is as robust as yours.[44]

Why is James willing to grant that this is a strange "kind" of faith? Perhaps we can suggest a reason. To believe (as opposed to to know) something (X) is to be willing to subscribe to the truth of certain propositions about X and yet not to be able to defend those propositions rationally. If we have been correct in our arguments, proofs for the existence of God are founded on belief statements (e.g., that the world is caused or intelligible) rather than knowledge statements.[45]

[43] Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (New York, 1935), p. 213.

[44] Ibid., p. 214.

[45] See above, pp. 81-88, 147.

The question is, why these belief statements rather than those. James and Pascal attempt to give some reasons for preferring one set of beliefs over the other. But they are not reasons based on a knowledge of X, they are not reasons which (in any event) transform belief into knowledge. They are reasons for accepting the truth of some propositions apart from any consideration of the object to which those propositions refer. We have, then, two kinds of reasons for belief; one is information (albeit incomplete) about the object of that belief; the other is information about the consequences of that belief (in terms other than the object). Clearly James and Pascal are dealing in the second sort. Reasons of the first variety are such that they transform belief into knowledge. If it were such reasons that were being urged then it would obviously make sense for James to exclaim, "Faith indeed!"--just as if someone were to say, "I have faith that this desk is hard," while he was writing on it. Faith indeed; he has knowledge. It could not be belief since belief is assent in the absence of knowledge. But since it is not knowledge of X that James is urging, it remains true to say that our commitment to propositions about X is one of faith and not of reason. James must have something else in mind when he questions whether this "facile faith" is truly faith. Perhaps it is because (as we have been suggesting) such faith is no longer faith in God; on the contrary it is faith in something else from which necessary assent to propositions about X is deduced. Consider a scientific example. I have no knowledge about the trees in India, but I believe they live by photosynthesis. Furthermore, I have reasons to support that belief, but they are not based on any knowledge of Indian trees. They are instead founded on other beliefs which I believe to have rational support and which I faithfully extend to the trees of India. When one reflects on the situation it becomes apparent that I really don't have faith in these propositions about Indian trees; it is more proper to say that I have faith in the laws of botany. To draw the parallel, if I say that I have reasons for a faith in God, but those reasons are not consequent upon any knowledge of God, I must mean that I subscribe to some principle (not God) which I am extending to include propositions about God. James' response, "Faith indeed!" is more than justified. He has faith, but it is not in God; it is in the principles of his pragmatism, faith that the expedient is the true, that "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief."[46] In short, we must subscribe to Santayana's interesting observation; he said of James, "He did not really believe; he merely believed in the right of believing that you might be right if you believed."[47]

Where does this pragmatic approach leave the atheist? I suspect it leaves him rather untouched. First, because it presupposes an indecisiveness which we have argued is only apparent, not real. Such that "If one has already quite firmly made up one's mind that theism is true, then the argument of James [and Pascal] is superfluous; if one has decided, with equal firmness, that theism is false, then it is of no avail."[48] If it is truly urged that he change his beliefs, the only honorable response he can make is "Alas! I am so made that I cannot believe." Second, if the argument is (as I believe it to be) really an inducement to believe because, then the issue of faith in God will be lost in the quest for a more ultimate belief. To speak of belief in God because is to cease speaking of belief in God.

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[46] James, Pragmatism, p. 59.

[47] George Santayana, Character and Opinion in the United States (New York, 1958), p. 47.

[48] Matson, p. 204.

Section III: Conclusion.

We again come up against belief, what Maritain has called a "primordial intuition," and what we have called an "absolute presupposition." Is it possible to go further? to explain man's intuitions? to give reasons for his faith? In a sense it is. Some would explain faith by noting that the believer was raised by such-and-such parents, or born in such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time. I will not attempt that for two reasons. First, because it is the job of the psychologist and the sociologist, not the philosopher, and if it must be done they could surely do it better than I. But second (and more important), to attempt such an explanation is to prostitute faith, to reduce it to reason, to measure it. It is to judge faith by what is not faith, to approach the internal through the external. It is apparent that this was the mistake of Pascal and James in their defense of faith; it rests on a misunderstanding of what faith really is. It is no less an insult to the believer (be he theist or atheist) to say that he believes because his parents believed than it is to say he believes because it is a good bet. Earlier we spoke in etymological terms of "explanation"; we said it was to make level, to overcome obstacles, to plane and make flat. To my mind we shall not come to an understanding of religious discourse so long as such "leveling" is our only tool. Faith is an obstacle--and it is one which reason is particularly hard-pressed to errode. Faith cannot be flattened; if an "explanation" must be made, faith will have to be removed.

But in saying this we must understand that faith is not to be limited to the theist. When we spoke of believers and juxtaposed them to non-believers we were wrong. All men are believers--but their faiths differ. (Unfortunately, history lacks an atheist with sufficient insight to tell the story of the atheist's faith as Kierkegaard has so skillfully told that of the theist's.[49]) We need an atheist who will proclaim with Tertullian, "Credo quia absurdum." It is simply erroneous to regard the atheist as a non-believer; "Absolute atheism is in no way a mere absence of belief in God."[50] Maritain, perhaps because he truly understands what it means to be a theist, has a profound insight into the faith of the atheist. "A man does not become an absolute atheist as a result of some inquiry into the problem carried on by speculative reason."[51] (The same is, of course, on our view, true of the theist.) On the contrary, atheism is "an act of faith in reverse gear."[52] Far from being irreligious, Maritain judges atheism to be "a religious phenomenon," "a full-blown religious commitment."[53] Indeed, when perceived under the aspect of his faith it becomes apparent that "With all his sincerity and devotion, the authentic, absolute atheist is after all only an abortive saint."[54]

[49] Nietzsche perhaps comes closest to achieving this goal.

[50] Maritain, Reason, p. 98.

[51] Ibid., p. 105.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., p. 106.

[54] Ibid., p. 113.

It is not reason which makes a given man regard the universe as eternal or temporal, nor is it reason which determines whether he will grant that God is "a being supremely perfect." Rather it is that sub-rational body of predispositions, or (if you will) "intuitions," which determine it. And determining it, they determine the debate that follows. We suggested above that perhaps the model of the Kantian categories was not inappropriate to the discussion of religious beliefs. It seems more and more obvious that the theist and the atheist see the world differently, that they bring a different explanatory framework to bear on it. In spite of the problems inherent in such a hypothesis I cannot help but regard it as a useful model. Somehow we must express the fact that, starting from different premises, the theist and non-theist are not going to find a middle ground on which they may successfully resolve their differences.

We have attempted to explore the relationship between the traditional religious proofs for the existence of God and the religious milieu out of which they emerge. We have asked, Do those proofs necessarily presuppose that milieu? In concluding that the arguments do in fact presuppose that religious environment, that without the presuppositions inspired by faith the arguments would collapse, we have found the answer to the question which we originally made it our intention to resolve, "Why is it that traditional theistic demonstrations of the existence of God fail to convince the atheist, but at the same time seem conclusive to many theists? And conversely, why are reasonable theists not swayed by the apparently cogent arguments of the atheist."[55]

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[55] See above, p. 4. We have addressed ourselves specifically

But what then is the point of a debate about the existence of God? If our intelligence is in some sense circumscribed by our prior beliefs why bother to go through the motions? I can answer only for myself, but for me it is a most significant enterprise. Not because I may "convert" any theist to my beliefs, nor because I enjoy the danger that he may convert me to his. But because in speaking together we do each other a great service. The dialogue makes us each, theist and atheist alike, more aware of what we believe, more aware of what it means to be a religious man (for surely none can doubt that atheists are also religious men). St. Anselm spoke of the theist and the atheist as seeking the same thing "While the unbelievers seek for a reason because they do not believe, and we because we do believe, nevertheless what we both seek is one and the same."[56] Perhaps that is why each profits from the discussion; in coming to know the other each comes closer to knowing himself.

to the proofs of the theist, and not directly to the atheist's arguments against the existence of God. However in considering the theist's arguments we have disclosed several identifiable ultimate presuppositions which are not shared by the atheist. We thereby indirectly discern the presuppositions of the atheist. For instance, when we learn that atheists do not accept the theist's belief that the universe as a whole must be caused we not only come to understand why the nontheist will not accept an argument which incorporates the premise that the universe is an effect; we also learn that the theist will not accept an argument which presupposes that the universe is uncaused.

[56] St. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo?, p. 182.

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